

# THE ARGOSY

NOVEMBER 1, 1871.

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## DENE HOLLOW.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

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### CHAPTER XV.

#### THE SNOW STORM.

**A** DARK, thick night, that of Friday, the twenty-third of December. The London and Worcester mail was toiling its slow way along towards the latter city under difficulties. Snow was falling heavily: snow had been falling, more or less, for some days. The coach was unusually laden. Although it was the Royal Mail, and carried his Majesty's letters, it was not on that account exempt from parcels, especially at the busy Christmas season; and it was crammed with presents from people in London to their friends in the country. Baskets of codfish, barrels of oysters, small hampers of wine; and passengers' luggage. Never had the Worcester mail been more weightily charged.

Four passengers sat inside; none out. People had not cared to risk the cold journey for so many hours outside when they could get an inside place. Of the passengers, one was a lady; the other three were gentlemen: and they leaned in their corners, well wrapped up, wishing the night was over, and inwardly grumbling at the tardy pace to which the state of the roads condemned them.

Slower and slower went the horses. After leaving London, the mail had got along pretty well and kept its time tolerably at the different halting-places for the change of horses: it was only within an hour, or so, that the roads had become what they were—nearly impassable. The poor horses toiled and pulled: never a handsomer team to look at than those four bright brown steeds: but they could not get along. The coachman—half blinded, himself, by the drifting storm—alternately

coaxed and whipped them. The guard rose perpetually in his seat behind to look out on the white mist, so far as he could see of it in the light given by the mail lamps. Then he would put his horn to his mouth, and blow a blast; sometimes short and snappish, sometimes patient and prolonged. To what end? It only went shrieking and echoing away to the lone country, its sound losing itself in the snow.

The horses came to a standstill, and the coachman turned his head to speak, from the midst of his mufflers. "Light your lantern, Jim, and see whether I *be* in the road."

The guard got down with his lighted lantern, and at once sank up to the knees in snow. "This can't be the highway," he muttered to himself. "If 'tis, the storm must have fell here kindly."

It was impossible to tell whether they were in the road or not. Snow was everywhere. So far as could be seen of the limited space on which light was thrown, the look-out presented nothing but one white plain: and those small white mountains, revealing glimpses of themselves in places, might be heaping drifts that had gathered, might be hedges that were covered: no human being could tell. The horses, panting after the laboured exertions they had made, tossed their heads to the reins and tried to shake themselves free: but the leaders would not go forward of their own will, and to urge them might bring death.

"It is o' no use, Smith," spoke the guard to the coachman at length, from the depths of his many capes and comforters. "We can't go on."

"What's us to do, then?"

"May I be pressed if I know!"

Meantime the inside passengers were gradually awaking from their state of semi-sleep to the fact that they had come to a standstill: that the mail was not progressing at all. Two of the gentlemen wore white cotton nightcaps; the third had a purple silk handkerchief tied on his head; the lady was enveloped in a quilted bonnet. In those days of long night stages, it was the custom to prepare for sleep inside the coaches with as much regard to comfort as circumstances permitted. One of the windows was let down, and the purple handkerchief, together with the head wrapped in it, thrust itself out to ascertain the cause of the delay.

"What's the matter?"

The guard with his lantern trod his way to the window at the call, as quickly as the depth of snow allowed him.

"We can't get on, sir."

"Not get on!" came the half-angry, half-authoritative rejoinder, in tones that are familiar to the reader. For the traveller with the purple silk handkerchief was Squire Arde.

"No, sir," repeated the guard, "we can't get on at all. The snow

has been uncommonly heavy here, and the horses are not able to make their way in it. It's coming down now as thick as ever I saw it : getting worse with every minute."

The startling news fully aroused the whole of the passengers. As many of the four heads as could come out at the two windows, came out, their faces presenting various phases of that undesirable emotion—consternation.

"We must get on, guard," spoke Squire Arde, with a stress on the "must" and the authority of one who is accustomed to command.

"I can't see how it is to be done, sir," civilly replied the man. "The leaders refuse to move of their own accord, as 'twere; and Smith dare not force 'em on. We don't know that we be in the road."

"But we must get on," pursued Squire Arde. "To-morrow will be Christmas Eve; and I—I—I have engagements at home that I cannot break or put off."

"To-day is Christmas Eve, sir," corrected the guard: "morning has been in some time. But we cannot get on any the more for that."

"Whereabouts are we?" was heard from a passenger who was unable to get his head out.

"Not such a great sight off Chipping Norton, sir," was the lucid answer. "Half way, maybe. But it's all guess-work."

"Is there any danger, guard?" called out the lady, in her quick, pleasant voice.

"Not as long as we keep still, ma'am."

"But surely we are not to keep still all night! Good gracious, guard! Why suppose—suppose another coach comes up and runs over us?"

"Another coach couldn't any more come up, ma'am, than we can get on," returned the guard; who seemed as much at a loss and as full of dismay as his passengers. "We might have done well to stop at Woodstock: the ostler there told Smith it would be a wonder if the mail made her way to Chipping Norton."

The gentleman with the largest cotton nightcap was striking his repeater. By the hour it gave back, he knew they could not hitherto have been very seriously delayed.

"Oh come, guard," said he, "it's not so bad. I daresay we can get on with a little perseverance. The snow must have drifted just here."

"That's what it is, sir. If it had been as bad before, we couldn't have got along at all. But it's of no use trying to get through this."

"What is to be done, Smith?" roared Squire Arde at the top of his voice to the coachman. "What is to be done?"

"Nothing—so far as he see," was the substance of the coachman's reply, given with equanimity. "If he tried to force the animals on, it might result in a upset down a bank, and cost all on 'em their lives, men and cattle too."

Even Squire Arde's impatience would not wish to risk that result. But he urged a cautious trial : as indeed did his fellow travellers. They thought it possible that the great drift of snow was confined to this one spot, and might be got through.

An effort was made. The guard and the passenger of the repeater went to the heads of the leaders ; and for a short space and with great caution some few yards of way were surmounted. But the snow got deeper : or, rather, they got deeper into it. The coachman's decided opinion was, that they had lost the road ; and that even this cautious moving was extremely perilous. So they desisted : life is sweet, and none of us are willing to risk it lightly. There appeared nothing for it but to remain as they were—stationary.

And, remain so, they did, until morning light. None of the passengers ever forgot that night. The fame of it went abroad ; and it is talked of to this day in the counties of Worcester, Oxford, and Gloucester.

When day dawned it was found that the coachman's conjecture was correct. They were off the road : and how they had penetrated without accident to the spot where they found themselves was a marvel. Inside a ploughed field stood the coach, its previously broken fence having removed the barrier between it and the highway. *But the fence was broken only for a very short space, not much more than enough to allow of the horses and mail getting through.* It was this that rendered it remarkable—that they should have passed through at that one particular spot. The snow fell incessantly : the road, even could they have got back to it, was utterly impassable ; to attempt to go on to Worcester out of the question for the present. By dint of exertion and skill, they reached a lonely farmhouse beyond the field : and, within its hospitable walls and stables, man and beast obtained the most welcome rest and shelter that any of them had ever enjoyed in their need.

I must beg you to note the days : for there was a singular romance attached to this detention of the mail and its passengers. People, interested in the fact, were wont to say that it had been stopped by the Finger of Heaven. This day, Saturday, was Christmas Eve ; Sunday would be Christmas Day : and Monday, the 26th, would be the eve of Miss Arde's wedding day.

When Mr. Arde went to London on the Monday, putting up at the Castle-and-Falcon, it had been his full intention to quit it by the Thursday night's mail, so as to reach Worcester on Friday morning, and his own home in the course of the day. But, when Thursday came, he found he was not able to do this ; and he wrote to his wife saying he should be home on Saturday. As we heard in a previous chapter.

This delay in London rather vexed him. For one thing, it prevented his joining the state dinner given by Sir Dene Clanwaring on Friday : and Mr. Arde was fond of good dinners. The fault was his lawyers' :



they were preparing Miss Arde's marriage settlement, and did not get it ready. He blew them up sharply : and on the Friday morning the deed was handed to him. On the Friday afternoon he was at the Bull-and-Mouth, and put himself into the Worcester mail—which in those days started early, either at four or five in the afternoon. He had with him the marriage settlement, and the marriage license ; a fine cod fish, and two barrels of oysters. So the mail started on its journey cheerfully enough ; and traversed part of the distance only to find it could not traverse the rest. Mr. Arde, when writing to his wife, had said he should be home on Saturday "without fail." But here he was instead : snowed-up in that lonely farmhouse, somewhere in the unknown regions around Chipping Norton : and, on the whole, glad that a farmhouse was there to be in.

Nevertheless, as the hours on the Saturday went on, and there appeared to be no chance whatever of their moving, for the snow continued to come down heavily at intervals, Mr. Arde chafed at the delay : showing some irritation on the point to his fellow travellers, and telling them that urgent business awaited him at his home in Worcestershire. Very true ; it did so. But had the business been ten times as urgent, had it involved life or death, he could not any more have helped the detention. When the elements set themselves against man, man is powerless to contend with them.

Beds were improvised for the travellers on Saturday night. The farmer and his family were hospitable to the last degree, and did their best in every way to make their unexpected guests comfortable. The mail coach, covered well with sacks to keep it dry, stood out in the snow ; the horses were in the stables ; the coachman and guard made themselves happy with the farmer's servants, and no doubt secretly enjoyed the holiday as an interlude of rest from their life's occupation.

Many were the anxious looks cast out on the weather when the travellers rose on Christmas morning. One sheet of white presented itself everywhere, and there was at least no chance of their getting on that day. The farmer feasted them right royally with turkeys, and other good things incidental to the season ; amidst which appeared Mr. Arde's large cod fish, and one of his barrels of oysters : a rare treat to the farmer and his people. They drew round the fire for dessert, to make merry, telling anecdotes and stories ; and for a time Squire Arde forgot his vexation. Some friends in the locality, who were to have partaken of the family's hospitality, dinner guests, could not get there for the snow.

On Monday, matters out of doors remained in the same state, and the prisoners had to be prisoners on that day still. Worse still, there seemed to be no indications that things would alter ; and Mr. Arde was at his wit's end. He chafed, he fumed, he marched to the doors, he opened the windows, he took counsel with the coachman and guard.

All to no purpose. The rest rallied him ; the lady laughed at him good-humouredly : cheerful-hearted herself under all circumstances of existence, however untoward, she merrily told him that the adventure was agreeable, rather than otherwise, and would serve them to talk of the remainder of life. Mr. Arde at length disclosed the reason of his impatience—his daughter, whose wedding was fixed for the following day, could not be married without him, as he bore the license and the settlements. They allowed the plea : agreeing with him that the detention was unfortunate : but they were unable to speed him onwards.

"Only think if I should not be home by to-morrow morning !" cried Mr. Arde, in accents of fear at the very thought.

"They would only have to postpone the ceremony for a day or two," cheerily pointed out the lady.

Squire Arde shook his head. "I don't like weddings being postponed," said he. "Old wives say it bodes ill luck, you know, Mrs. W—. We must get away somehow to-night."

And out he went again in his restlessness, to see the guard and coachman.

Must get away to-night ! Squire Arde might as well have said he must go up in a balloon and get the clerk of the weather to change the aspect of affairs. There was as much possibility of his doing the one as the other. Monday wore on. The travellers sat by the fire, and played cards, and the good farmer feasted his guests again. Not one of them in after life forgot his genuine hospitality and kindness. For I am recording only what took place in actuality. Up to this time ; all Saturday, all Sunday, all Monday ; they had been detained. So prolonged and heavy a snow-fall had not been known in the country for years and years.

Tuesday morning. Squire Arde was the first to gaze out anxiously. It was the wedding-day—or ought to have been—and he was nearly rampant. For though a very easy man in general, it was in Mr. Arde's nature to put himself fiercely out when anything went wrong on great occasions : and perhaps the consciousness of the very fact that in his heart he did not cordially like Captain Clanwaring for his daughter's husband, made him all the more impatient to get the marriage over and done with. Doubt would then be off his mind. Ever and anon in the past few weeks a voice had been whispering to him that he and his wife might be wrong to have urged Jarvis Clanwaring upon Mary : she was young enough and could have waited to make another choice. However, what was fixed, was fixed : and the Squire now only wanted to be at home and get it over. But this snowstorm was preventing him.

As an imprisoned bird flutters his wings against the bars of his cruel cage, vainly endeavouring to escape from it, so it was with George Arde. He chafed as before, he fretted, he fumed ; all to as little purpose as the poor caged bird. As the one cannot break his wire bars,

neither could the other his fetters. What mattered it to Mr. Arde though the weather on this Tuesday morning was changing—giving evident signs of a speedy break up! It did not serve him. Had the roads between that farmhouse and Hurst Leet been instantaneously rendered, by some miracle, clear as a bowling-green, he could not have reached home in time for the ceremony: no, not by the help of the fleetest horse. Mrs. W—, good, trusting woman that she was, then, and throughout all the trouble that was destined to come to her in later life—said to him that these vexatious impediments sometimes intervened only to answer some wise end. But Mr. Arde wholly refused to see it, and chafed amazingly.

By Tuesday night the high road had become passable for large vehicles: and the mail, leaving London that afternoon for Worcester, absolutely passed on its way. Nothing of this was known at the farm. News certainly did come in that the highway was tolerably clear. What of that?—it only served to exasperate Mr. Arde the more. For this mail of his, this miserable mail, embedded deep in the ruts and snow, could not as yet be got by any manner of means to the highway. And thus another night passed, and the prisoners were prisoners still. Squire Arde decided that fate and fortune were alike against him.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### AT BEECHHURST DENE.

IN Gander's pantry, a sociable kind of room panelled with oak, stood over the fire Otto Clanwaring and the butler; the latter in his usual striped morning jacket, which he wore summer and winter, and with a tea-cloth in his left hand. Gander was frightfully discomposed. In all the years that the man had lived with Sir Dene, he had never been so put out as he was now, at the disappearance of the case of diamonds. It was Saturday morning, and Christmas Eve: for we have to go back a little to record what had been taking place during the snowstorm at Beechhurst Dene and elsewhere. The grand dinner, as may be remembered, took place on the previous night, Friday; and Sir Dene, fatigued with his exertions as host, was not yet up.

"No, Mr. Otto, you had better *not* go in to see him," Gander was saying with quite the same amount of decisive authority that he had used when the barrister was a boy. "When my master says to me 'Gander, you'll take care that I am not disturbed for a bit,' why it's my place to take care he's not, sir; and Sir Dene knows that I shall take care."

"I should be the last to disturb him against his will, Gander."

"Yes, I think you would be, Mr. Otto."

"The dinner was too much for him, that's the fact," observed Otto.

"A courteous-natured man, as my grandfather eminently is, exerts himself at all cost to entertain guests when they are around him: and a state occasion like that last night involves a continual strain on the exertion, mentally and bodily. Sir Dene should have given up the presidency to—to Captain Clanwaring; and sat, himself, as a guest."

"He'd not do that," disputed Gander. "While he's able to appear among 'em at all, it'll be as head and chief. Quite right too. To Captain Clanwaring he never would give up," boldly added Gander; "he don't like him well enough. I can't tell but what he might ha' give up last night after what happened, had the heir, Mr. Dene, been here."

Otto said nothing to this. Whatever might be his own private contempt for his elder brother, he did not choose to speak of it to the butler.

"What a snow we are having, Gander!" he cried, turning his eyes on the white landscape outside the window, by way of changing the conversation.

"'Twas not the entertaining o' the folks, Mr. Otto; my master's equal to that once in a way yet; though I think it'll be the last time he'll ever attempt it," resumed Gander, disregarding the remark about the snow. "'Twas that awful upset just as the company was arriving. It shook him frightful. My wonder was that he sat down to table at all. I'm sure I didn't know whether I stood on my head or my heels all the while I waited."

"Yes," said Otto, looking close at the fire; "it is not pleasant to miss one's family diamonds."

"No, it's *not*," significantly spoke Gander. "Not a wink o' sleep has the poor master had for thinking on't. And he has been getting a notion into his head in the night about it that makes him feel worse."

"What notion's that?"

"Well, he thinks 'twas no common thief that took 'em," returned Gander, gently swaying his tea-cloth.

"No common thief!"

"No housebreaker, nor nothing o' that sort. 'Don't *you* be put out about it, Gander,' says he to me; '*you'd* not touch the diamonds'—for you see, Mr. Otto, 'twas an awk'ard loss for me, and I told him so; nobody but me, besides himself, having access to the keys that unlocked the box. He had been thinking it over in the night, the master went on to say, and he had come to the notion that somebody had took them diamonds to make money upon 'em."

Knowing what he did know, the usually impassive face of the bar-rister turned as red as a schoolgirl's. Glancing up at Gander's clock, he made some light remark about the hour. But the butler was not to be repressed.

"It have been nothing but worrying him for money this many a

year past. Worry, worry, worry : I wonder sometimes that the master stands it, and so 'ud you wonder, Mr. Otto, if you were in the midst on't. My lady's at him perpetual : it's money for herself she wants, or for the captain, or for *you*. As for the captain, he have not dared to ask on his own score this long while, for Sir Dene 'll never hear him."

Otto Clanwaring opened his lips to say that none of the solicited money had been for himself ; but closed them again without speaking. A shrewd suspicion lay upon him, gathered from Gander's glance and from Gander's tone, that the man guessed it perfectly.

"And so, Mr. Otto, Sir Dene thinks, seeing that lately he has not responded much to the demands but just shut up his breeches pockets, that perhaps the diamonds have been took to make money upon. Borrowed, you know."

An idea again crossed the mind of Otto Clanwaring, that Gander had his suspicions that he, Otto, knew something of this ; drawn no doubt from his perhaps too evident efforts to hush up the matter on the previous night when the loss was discovered. Otherwise the man would hardly so have spoken.

"I can only say, Gander, that I have not borrowed the diamonds—as you call it."

"Not likely, Mr. Otto. But now, you look here, sir. If them diamonds could be brought back—or if proof could be give to the master that they bain't lost outright, sold, say, 'twould comfort him."

Otto really knew not what to answer.

"I was thinking, sir, that perhaps we might ha' got up a little bit of a plot; you and me. If you could get the diamonds, I'd carry the case in my hand to Sir Dene, and say, 'Look here, master, at what I've done ; at my poor old foolish memory;' and vow to him that I had put 'em elsewhere for safety when I was a rubbing of 'em up, and forgot it.—Just as the widow Barber put away that paper of her'n years ago, and couldn't find it again, and had to turn out of her place in consequence."

"Are you suggesting this out of consideration for Sir Dene, or for others?" enquired Otto.

"Why, for Sir Dene of course, sir," replied Gander, with an emphasis and a flick of the tea-cloth, that seemed to imply he'd not trouble himself to do it for others. "I'd spread the diamonds out before him to comfort him ; and he'd believe, listening to me, that they had never been lost, but in my stupid memory. 'Twould be a pack o' lies : but heaven ud forgive me for the sake o' the poor master. He's too old to have these tricks played him, Mr. Otto : and the loss o' them diamonds is just telling upon his mind ; and I dun know what the end on't 'll be."

There was a pause of silence. The barrister had his head bent as

if in thought ; Gander and his cloth were perfectly still, waiting for an answer.

"Tell me freely why you are saying this," said Otto, looking up suddenly, his indifferent tone changing to a frank one. "You have something in your thoughts, Gander."

"Well, sir, as it's you, and you ask me, I think I will tell. Captain Clanwaring has got the diamonds."

An exceedingly disagreeable sensation, resembling shame, seized hold of Otto on hearing this. He gave the man a word of reprimand and bade him not talk so fast. It was not Otto's duty to betray his brother.

"I am just as sure of it as that we two be talking here, Mr. Otto," persisted Gander. "After the company had gone last night, Miss Louisa—Mrs. Letsom, that is—came into my pantry here, and began again about the diamonds, vowing she would have every nook and corner o' the house turned out, and every servant in it searched, them and their boxes. All in a minute, in come Captain Clanwaring. He seized hold of her and said—well, I hardly know what he said, Mr. Otto, and at the time he didn't see me, for I'd gone behind the screen there. Just a few words, it was, ordering her to be *quiet*: but they startled me. His face was as white as white paint when it's got varnish on't, a kind o' blazing white. He had took enough to drink too. I knew then who had got the diamonds: and Miss Louisa, I fancy she knew, for she turned as white as he was, and never spoke another word. 'Twas my lady who cribbed 'em out o' the chest, I guess, Mr. Otto. Must ha' been. Nobody but her could get to Sir Dene's keys—save me."

Otto Clanwaring, the rising barrister, casting glances towards a future chief judgeship, possibly to something higher than that, bit his lip almost to bleeding. How painful this was to him, a man of honour, his sharp accent told.

"Then it was you who instilled these suspicions into the mind of Sir Dene, Gander!"

"Not a bit on't, sir. I've never let em out o' my mind till this moment, and I shan't speak of 'em again. Sir Dene took 'em up for himself in the night, while he lay awake. Hinting at 'em to me this morning when I went in, I pretended to say that he must be mistaken."

"And you must be mistaken, Gander," spoke Otto decisively. "Better not let Captain Clanwaring hear you."

"Let it go so, Mr. Otto," returned the man calmly. "But—if there's any means o' getting the diamonds back, *get 'em back*, for the poor master's sake."

"Sir Dene must talk to you very confidentially, Gander!"

"So he do, sir. There's been nobody else here the past twelvemonth for him to talk to but me, and he has got into the habit on't. You've



all been away but the captain; and the master wouldn't talk to *him*. If Mr. Tom was here 'twould be different."

The ringing of Sir Dene's bell broke up the colloquy. Gander threw his tea-cloth on a chair and hastened upstairs: leaving Otto standing over the fire.

It was a painfully humiliating moment for Otto Clanwaring. That the affair had taken place exactly as the old serving man had divined—his mother abstracting the case from the chest and handing it to Jarvis—Otto felt as sure of as though he had seen it done. With his whole heart, he hated the clear-sightedness of Gander in this. Although the man had been in the family so many years as to have become almost like one of themselves, it was not pleasant that he should be cognisant of this disgraceful act.

"What a curse are spendthrift habits!" cried the barrister in his bitterness.

Quitting the pantry, he bent his steps to the library, where he expected to find his mother and brother alone. He intended to act on Gander's suggestion, and ask them to redeem the diamonds, if possible. The time had gone by for mincing the matter, in the opinion of Otto Clanwaring.

With the snowy landscape out of doors so suggestive of cold, and the blazing fire within, the library presented a picture of warm comfort. Lady Lydia and Jarvis sat on a sofa, and were evidently consulting together. Jarvis lay back against one of its cushions, yawning and stretching, and not looking any the fresher for the quantity of wine taken at the past night's dinner. Otto took up his stand before them; and in a low voice and in a few words said what he had to say. It brought my lady bolt upright. She told Otto he was mad.

"I know you have pledged the diamonds, Jarvis," went on Otto. "What did you get upon them?"

"It's a lie," said polite Jarvis.

"Look here," quietly rejoined Otto, "this sort of thing will do no good. The job is a bad job altogether, but it's *done*; and all that remains now is to see whether it can be undone. Don't trouble yourself to deny it to me, Jarvis. I have known of the transaction all along."

"What an infernal lie!" amended Jarvis.

"Pale the money-lender holds the diamonds. I saw you leave them with him at his house; I saw you receive the wages."

An explosive burst of abuse from Jarvis. Abuse of the money-lender, who must, as he concluded, have betrayed trust; fiercer abuse of Otto. Lady Lydia, fearing the noise might penetrate beyond the room, stood between them, praying them to be tranquil.

"It could not be helped," she said to Otto, finding how useless it would be to play longer at denial. "Jarvis was *obliged* to have money, and there were no other means whatever of raising it. The diamonds



were lying there useless, not looked at from year's end to year's end; and I assumed to a certainty that they would be replaced before Sir Dene could find it out. There's no great harm done," she concluded in a slighting tone.

"As he has found it out, they must be brought back," was Otto's answer. "For Sir Dene's sake. Do you hear, Jarvis?"

"They can be brought back, and will be brought back, as soon as the wedding is over, without any of your confounded interference," spoke Jarvis sullenly. "But for the delay in that, they'd have been home before."

"Some days to wait yet!" remarked Otto. "Were the roads clear—but it's hardly to be expected with this continued fall of snow—I would go up to London and get them, if you could find the money."

Jarvis half laughed in derision. He find the money! When the ten thousand pounds to be allotted to him of Mary Arde's fortune should have passed with herself into his own possession, he would have more than enough money for everything. Until then he had not a stiver.

"What did you get from Pale on them?" asked Otto.

"Only a trifle. Three hundred pounds."

Three hundred pounds! In truth it was a sum far beyond any possible means to find. Otto imparted a hint that Sir Dene suspected something, but held his tongue about Gander. A great pity crossed his heart when he thought of Mary Arde. Tied to this spendthrift, what would her future be? But that Jarvis was his brother, and brotherhood involves obligations, Otto had certainly opened the eyes of the ruling powers at Arde Hall.

"It is nothing short of a fraud," exclaimed Otto.

"What is?" snapped his mother.

"The marrying Mary Arde."

My lady's eyes and tongue alike blazed forth their denunciation of Otto and his gratuitous opinion; and he was fain to hold his peace.

She went into Sir Dene's room as soon as she could get admittance, which was not until the baronet had dressed for the day, and was sitting by his fire. There she set herself, in her plausible way, to disperse any doubt that might lie on Sir Dene's mind of Jarvis in connection with the diamonds. He heard her in silence, saying nothing, and whether she made any impression upon him or not, or whether he really did entertain any doubt of Jarvis, she could not tell. Of course she was unable to speak out on the matter, or to defend Jarvis openly: it had all to be done by implication. That Sir Dene was looking unusually worn and ill that day, was plainly observable; he seemed to be nearly prostrate, sunk far in a state of apathy.

"I quite think with dear Jarvis that it is no common thief who has taken them," remarked Lady Lydia: for she continued to pursue the subject long after it might have been wiser to drop it. "As you said

last night, Sir Dene, whoever took the diamonds must have known they were kept in the chest——”

“And known where my keys are kept too, my lady, when I have not got them about me.”

It was the first time he had spoken, and the interruption was a quick one. My lady coughed.

“Ah yes, no doubt,” she blandly said. “Those diamonds, I fancy, had not been looked at for a year. Perhaps not for considerably more than that.”

No answer.

“There is only one possible solution of the mystery that occurs to me; and that may not be the true one. But you know, dear Sir Dene, we cannot help our thoughts.”

Still no answer. Sir Dene was bending forward, his hands resting on his stick, his eyes bent on the carpet, as if he were studying its pattern. Lady Lydia brought her face a little nearer to his, and her low voice took a confidential tone.

“Did that worthless, ungrateful fellow, Tom Clanwaring, help himself to them before he went away? It is the question I am asking myself, Sir Dene. He knew where the keys——”

Not quite at the first moment had Sir Dene gathered the sense of the implication. It flashed across him now. He started up in fierce passion, grasping his stick menacingly. Perhaps the fact of his *knowing* Tom could have had nothing to do with the loss, rendered his anger at the aspersion the greater. For it happened that both Sir Dene and Gander knew the diamonds were safe six months ago. Searching the chest in the month of June for something wanted, they had seen the case there.

Rarely had Lady Lydia heard a similar burst of reproach from Sir Dene's lips. In spite of the animosity which he had been professing for Tom latterly, as well as really indulging, his true feelings for him peeped out now. How *dared* she so asperse his best grandson, the son of his dear dead son Geoffry, he asked her. Tom was a gentleman at heart, and would be one always; a true Clanwaring, he, with all a Clanwaring's honour; and he had a great mind to despatch Gander to Ireland when the snow had melted, that he might bring him back to the Dene by force. Things had never gone well since Tom left. As to that bold baggage up at the Trailing Indian—it must have been her fault more than his; she was older than Tom, and had got ten times the brass. Many a light-headed young fellow had done as much in his hot blood, and repented afterwards, and made all the better man for it. Sir Dene was a fool for sending Tom away—did my lady hear?—a fool. A fool for that, and for a good deal more.

Thus he went on, saying in his passion anything that came uppermost; but no doubt giving vent to his true sentiments.

became meek as a lamb, and metaphorically stopped her ears. Especially to the repeated insinuation that other folks knew where his keys were kept, and the diamonds too, as well as Tom; the "other folks" pointing indubitably to herself, if not to her son Jarvis.

When the storm died out, and Sir Dene had sunk back in his chair, exhausted, Lady Lydia made a pretence of gently tending the fire, talking about the snow, and the weather generally, and the past night's company while she did it; any safe topic that occurred to her. She then withdrew from the room, and left Sir Dene to his repose. It would not do, she saw it clearly, to say too much about the diamonds while he was in this untoward frame of mind. That he had a doubt of *her* she felt convinced; but she was not so sure that he doubted Jarvis. With her whole heart she wished the wedding over and the diamonds replaced. Had it been in her habit to pray, she would have prayed that Tuesday might arrive on eagle's wings.

Meanwhile, as the day wore on, some uneasiness was excited in the Arde family at the non-arrival of its master. The hall was in a vast commotion of preparation, not only for the wedding itself, but for the dinner entertainment that was to be given on its eve, Monday night. Towards Saturday night, the non-appearance of Mr. Arde was explained. Some farmers, making their slow way home from Worcester market, brought word that the London coaches, including the mail, had not been able to reach Worcester, from the impassable state of the roads. Report spoke of "mountains of snow" in the low-lying lands around Moreton-in-the-Marsh. Mr. Tillet of Harebell Farm, knowing that Mrs. Arde was anxious and uneasy, called at the Hall to tell her this.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, at the news. "Will the coaches not be able to get in to-day at all, think you, Mr. Tillet?"

Looking out on the snow, remembering what the signs abroad were, Mr. Tillet thought it hardly likely that the coaches could get in.

"If any one of them does, it will be the mail," he remarked. "That is sure to make its way when it can, on account of the letter-bags."

"I suppose it is bad between this and Worcester?" said Mrs. Arde.

"Worse, madam, than I have ever known it. In places I hardly thought I should get my horse along."

"A pretty long while some of the people must have been, getting home last night from the dinner at Sir Dene's!" exclaimed May.

Mr. Tillet laughed. "They'd arrive in time for breakfast, Miss May."

"Mamma," said May in an eager kind of tone after Mr. Tillet was gone, "if it's like this, we shall not be able to dine at Beechhurst Dene to-morrow."

"Nonsense, May. There can be no difficulty at any time in going that short distance. Besides, the upper road is not one for the snow to lie upon: it slopes slightly all along on the one side, you know."

May sighed. Only the not dining at the Dene on the morrow in the company of Jarvis Clanwaring, would have seemed a relief. Now that the union with him was drawing near, all her old horror of it had returned. She hated it and dreaded it in what seemed, even to herself, a most wicked degree. And yet—how was she to help it? She did not know, poor girl. Many and many a minute did she pass, praying on her knees to God, that He would pity her and help her to put away the sin.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## A DISH OF TEA AT THE FORGE.

CHRISTMAS DAY. Before the morning had well dawned, the children from the gate-keeper's lodge trooped up to Beechhurst Dene, were admitted by the servants, and gathered themselves in a group at the top of the stairs near the doors of the best chambers, to sing their carol. It was a universal custom, this carol-singing in those days: and, as a rule, servants in every great house were up early, expecting it. Gander had been on thorns, wishing to get into his master's chamber to see how he had slept, and to take him some tea: but as Sir Dene chose to be first of all aroused on Christmas Day by the carol-singing, almost as if it were a religious rite, and that nothing else should previously disturb him, Gander waited.

The carol chosen by the children this year—or rather chosen for them by older heads—was a new one, called "The Carnal and the Crane." It was tolerably long. At the first verse of it, Mrs. Letsom's little ones in their white night-gowns were peeping down through the balustrades above. While below, collected near the foot of the stairs, stood all the servants, including Gander. Partially hiding themselves however, that the sight of them might not daunt the shy young carol singers. The verses well through to the end, came the final benediction; spoken, not sung.

"Wish ye a merry Christmas, Sir Dene, and ladies and gentlemen all; and a happy new year, and a many on 'em."

The little white-gowned people above clapped their hands; the servants clapped theirs, and applauded. Now, it had been the invariable custom, during this applause, for Sir Dene's door to open from the inside and a small shower of sixpences, agreeing with the number of singers, to be pitched forth among them. Be you very sure the singers looked for this observance with eager eyes. But on this morning they looked in vain. The door remained closed.

"Come you down, dears," called out gently one of the head women servants, breaking at length the waiting pause. "Come you down to your hot coffee. Sir Dene's asleep, maybe; he's not well just now. He'll send you out his sixpences later."

A good breakfast was always provided for the singers in the kitchen.

And again on New Year's morning, with a second sixpence. For the same ceremony took place then. Only the carol chosen was a different one, and the after wish for a merry Christmas omitted.

In obedience to the call, the children went down as quietly as their timid feet allowed them. And Gander went up. "Maybe he's not well enough to get out o' bed himself," ran his thoughts in regard to his master, "and is waiting for me to fetch the sixpences. I know he had got 'em put ready last night."

Knocking gently at the door, and receiving no response, Gander went in. The chamber appeared to be just as he had left it the previous night, none of the curtains undrawn. Turning to the bed, he saw his master.

"The Lord be good to us!" ejaculated Gander.

For Sir Dene Clanwaring was lying with his face drawn, and apparently senseless. He had had some kind of attack, probably paralysis.

Mr. Prior pronounced the attack to be a very slight one, quite untended with present danger. But there was no warranty that another might not succeed it; and the doctor enjoined strict quiet in the chamber and out of it.

"I'll lay a guinea as it comes o' the worry about them there diamonds!" was Gander's private comment to Otto Clanwaring.

There was no dinner company. A message was despatched to inform the Ardes of what had occurred and to stop their coming. Neither did any of the Beechhurst Dene people attend morning service, although it was both Sunday and Christmas Day, the snowy state of the roads preventing it as much as the state of Sir Dene. The Ardes and their servants went: but they were nearer the church. Mrs. Arde and May would dine quietly at home, Captain Clanwaring their only visitor. It was the captain who had carried down the news of what had occurred, and then got his invitation. The Miss Dickereens were not sent for as on the previous Christmas Day: perhaps Mrs. Arde thought they might not care to encounter the snow. Mrs. Arde was thoroughly put out by the prolonged absence of her husband. His decision was wanted on many details connected with the wedding, and he was not there to give it.

As for May, in her heart she could very well have dispensed also with Captain Clanwaring. Never had she felt more wretched than on this day. Try as she would she was unable to rally her spirits. A weight, as of impending evil, seemed to lie upon her: and had the coming Tuesday been to witness her hanging instead of her wedding, she could not have looked forward to it in a more gloomy spirit. As she recalled the happiness of the last Christmas, a half groan burst from her lips: the contrast between that day and this was so great. *Then* she had wondered whether things could ever look cloudy again: *now*

the secret cry of her heart was—that never again could they look bright. Ah, should not experience have taught her a lesson? That unclouded brightness had all too soon faded into a darkness as of night: might not the present darkness clear itself into day? Heaven however was at work for Mary Arde, though she knew it not.

"I suppose, Miss May, there's no reason why I may not run home," spoke Susan Cole, towards dusk in the afternoon. "They've invited me there to take a dish o' tea."

"Why should there be?" replied Miss May with apathy.

"You won't want me, I mean? I thought you'd be out you see, Miss May, when I promised to go. Mother, she's getting old now and looks out for one, once she expects one's coming."

"I shall not want you for anything, Susan," said May, rousing herself. "You'll have a fine snowy walk, though."

"I'll borrow a pair o' Mark's gaiters and pick my petticoats up round me," was Susan's unceremonious avowal. "'Twon't hurt me."

"I am glad to dine at home, for my part, instead of at the Dene," remarked May. "Friday's dinner there was so tedious."

Susan shook her head. "Miss May, I don't like them break-ups to old customs. For ever so many years now, till the last, the Hall has dined at the Dene on Christmas Day; and the Dene with the Hall on New Year's Day. Last year 'twas broke through. The master here warn't well enough to go to the Dene, or thought he warn't, and so none of you went: and when New Year's Day come round, Sir Dene, he warn't well enough to come here. 'Twas odd that the custom o' both days should be interrupted. I said then 'twas like a break-up, Miss May; and so it have proved. All the rest o' Beechhurst Dene come here, but Sir Dene. He didn't though; and he's the master."

"The rest did not all come," said May, quietly.

"All but Mr. Tom. And he ceased to be one o' the Beechhurst Dene folks that same night."

"Yes," said May. "Turned from it."

"Served him right," retorted Susan. "What did he get into mischief for?"

May's face took a sudden glow of colour, red as a fire coal.

"I wish I was over in Paris, or somewhere," she suddenly exclaimed after a pause, "and all this worry over."

"What worry?" questioned Susan.

"Of the wedding—and the people."

"Weddings comes but once in a life-time. It's right to have a show and bustle over 'em, Miss May."

May, seated on a low toilette-chair covered with white dimity, for the colloquy was taking place in her bed-room, began scoring her blue silk



dress across with her nail, and made no answer. Very pretty she looked. Her cheeks were somewhat thinner than of yore, but they had not lost their rose colour: her beautiful, soft brown eyes were lustrous still, her hair was bright. The allusion to Paris meant more than the chance remark the reader may have imagined it to be. A visit to Paris was in those days a very uncommon thing: and Captain Clanwaring had proposed to take May there after the marriage. They were not to settle down in a home yet awhile, for some months, at least; but take their pleasure. In fact, the question of where the home should be was left in abeyance: Mr. and Mrs. Arde naturally wished it to be near them: Captain Clanwaring secretly wished they might get it. He could not live long away from London and its attractions, and did not mean to try to. "Once she's my wife, safe and sure, she will have to do as I please," he told himself. And—to prevent the question of their future home being decided beforehand, he had ingeniously laboured to inoculate his bride elect with a wish to see Paris and its wonders, which he had never seen himself; as well as other places. Poor May thought that seeing wonders might help her to bear her lot—which in prospective was looking cruelly hard, whatever it might prove in reality. She had her private thoughts also as well as he. "Once I am his wife, I shall be able to put away all these old regrets—and longings—and misery. And the further I am away from here, the better chance there'll be of my doing it. Nothing like old associations for keeping up old feelings." So the proposal of sojourning in Paris, London, Bath, and elsewhere, had been rather eagerly received by May. In summer they were to come on a visit to the Hall.

"Talking o' Tom Clanwaring, that there girl's back again at the Trailing Indian," cried free-tongued Susan, with her usual lack of regard to what was expedient to be spoken of, and what was not.

May lifted her head in a kind of quick surprise; and dropped it again.

"I come out o' church to-day with Matty Pound," continued Susan. "While picking our way through the snow in the churchyard, she began a telling me that Emma Geach was back—may be the sight o' Mr. Geoffrey Clanwaring's gravestone put Matty in mind on't. Sam Pound called in at their cottage yesterday, and told 'em the girl got home o' Friday evening by the waggon. Sam's in a fine way over it, his mother says, afraid he won't be wanted at the inn no longer, now she's come. And a nice stock of impudence she must have, to take Black by storm in that way, without saying with your leave or by your leave, now she's got tired of Ireland!" added Susan on her own score. "Or perhaps it is that Ireland have got tired of her."

"That's enough," coldly interposed Miss May, rising from her seat with a haughty gesture, on her way to quit the room. "These things are nothing to me."



Neither had Susan Cole supposed they were, or could be, anything to her now. But in Susan's insatiable love of retailing gossip, she had not been able to keep her tongue still.

"Won't you dress now, Miss May?"

"I shall not dress to-day more than I am dressed."

"Well, and I don't see that there's need on't," acquiesced Susan. "That's a lovely pretty frock, that silk is."

The frock—as a young lady's dress was invariably styled then—was of that dark bright blue colour called Waterloo Blue, after the somewhat recent battle of Waterloo. It was made in the fashion of the day—low neck and short sleeves, each edged with a quilling of white net, a bit of drooping lace falling beneath. Only a young girl did May look in it; not much more than a child. Susan watched her down the stairs; the graceful head thrown back further than usual.

"It's a sore point still, I can see, about that Emma Geach," muttered Susan. "Why couldn't Tom Clanwaring have kept the wench there till the wedding was over and Miss May gone? He ——"

The words were stopped by the return of May. "Susan, mind you give your mother that little present I left out for her: and take her some of our mince pies," she said. "And tell her—tell her that I will be sure to come and see her the first thing when I am back here again in summer."

In her red cloth cloak and black poke bonnet, with her petticoats gathered up nearly to the tops of the beaver gaiters, thick shoes on, and no pattens, for pattens were only an incumbrance in the snow, their rings getting clogged continually, away started Susan at the dusk hour to partake of the "dish of tea" at her brother's forge. It was open road all the way, and less difficult to traverse than she had expected. The forge was waiting for Susan: though rather doubtful as to her coming. Mrs. Cole, the mother, a mild, loving woman always, doubly so now she was getting in years, sat in her arm-chair in the full warmth of the parlour fire, with her two sons: Harry, the prop and stay of the home and business; and Ham, who shod the horses, beat the iron, and did the other rough work. They were good sons: and it was thought that Harry, so good-looking and popular, had kept single for his mother's sake. On the table stood a substantial tea: plum cake, cold savory sausages, and plates of buttered toast that the young servant brought in. One guest had already arrived, uninvited: and that was Miss Emma Geach. In the old days Emma Geach had made herself tolerably at home at the forge: and after ill report had touched her name, gentle Mrs. Cole, willing to "think no evil," had received her and been kind to her as before.

"That's Susan!—I thought she'd come," exclaimed Ham, as a thumping was heard at the door, together with a stamping of feet. "She's knocking the snow off her shoes."

Ham (a contraction of his name, Abraham) ran to admit her, and took the opportunity of holding a whispered colloquy on the mat, the parlour door being shut.

"I say, Susan, Emma Geach is in there!"

"None of your stories, Ham!" cried Susan, sharply.

"She walked in just now, a saying she was come to have tea with us, if mother 'ud let her, for it was awful dull work up at the Trailing Indian," continued Ham. "She's just the same, Susan."

"What did mother say?" was Susan's indignant question.

"Say? Why, nothing: except that she was welcome. You know what mother is."

"And Harry?"

"Harry's the same as mother for being civil to people," returned Ham.

"I've a good mind not to go in," said Susan. "Perhaps I might get telling her a bit o' my mind."

"I'd not do that, Susan—it's Christmas Day. Besides, her affairs isn't any business of yours. She has not harmed you."

"I'm not so sure o' that," disputed Susan, sharply. "'Twas not by straightforward means she got Tom Clanwaring into her clutches, I know—and I nursed him all through his baby years. Is she going to stop to tea with us?"

"Well," said Ham, simply, "we can't turn her out. Neither mother nor Harry 'ud like to do it, Susan."

Susan, arming herself for any possible battle, went in with her head up. Miss Geach looked completely at home. Her out-door things were off; her abundant hair, well cared for, shone in the glow of the fire, and she was talking and laughing with Harry Cole in the old light and free manner. Susan, after greeting her mother, took off her things, and sat down to make tea. It might be, that her propensity for gossip and to have her curiosity somewhat appeased as to the past, induced her to postpone hostilities, for she nodded to Miss Emma without much show of disdain.

"And when did you get back?" demanded Susan, when she handed the young person her tea.

"Friday night," said Emma promptly.

"Oh. Had a stormy passage on't? I've heered it's mortal bad at sea at this season o' the year."

Whether Emma Geach did not understand the allusion, or whether she would not take it, remained a question. After staring at the speaker for a minute or two in silence, she tasted her tea and asked for another lump of sugar.

"And Ireland? What sort of a place might it be to live in?" began Susan again, satirically.

Another stare from Emma Geach. She had got a saucerful of tea up

to her mouth then, and gazed over the brim at Susan all the while she drank it.

"How should I know what sort of a place Ireland is?" she retorted, when putting the saucer down. Susan Cole looked upon it as an evasion, and was in two minds whether, or not, to tell her so. But at that moment her brother Harry kicked her under the table; and she knew it was as much as to say, She's our guest for the time and must be treated as such.

So the conversation turned on other matters. Sir Dene's seizure; and the non-gathering at the Dene for the Christmas dinner in consequence, which Susan told of. Next the prolonged absence of Mr. Arde came up, and the old lady expressed a devout hope that he would be home for the wedding on Tuesday.

"What wedding? Who's a going to be married?" enquired Miss Geach when she heard this.

"Why, my young lady, Miss May's a going to be married," said Susan, proud of relating so much. "Have you lived in a wood, Emma Geach, not to ha' heerd on't?"

"That there Trailing Indian's worse nor a wood now, as far as hearing news goes," was Emma Geach's rather wrathful answer. "'Taint lively at the best o' times; but nobody cares to come up to it through the snow. Since I got into the place, I've not seen a soul but Black and Sam Pound. Black, he's sullen and won't talk: and t'other knows he must keep his tongue still afore me, unless I choose to let him wag it. No fear as I should ha' got to hear of a wedding being agate from them two."

"We've got a grand dinner o' Monday night," spoke Susan, by way of continuing her revelations. "The Hall be a'most turned inside out. I can't think what'll be done if the Squire don't get here."

"Report says that no coaches are getting into Worcester," said Harry Cole. "It's to be hoped the roads 'll clear for the wedding."

"So 'tis," said Susan. "They be a going to Paris and France, they be, when the wedding's over. Miss May's full on't."

"My!" exclaimed Emma Geach. "It's young Squire Scrop suppose."

"Miss Charlotte Scrope's to be bridesmaid," went on Susan, her tongue too busy to heed the question. "She and Miss May is to be dressed all in white; only Miss May's to have a veil and orange flowers in her bonnet, and t'other not?"

"I thought May Arde would have him some time if he stuck up to her well," remarked Emma Geach. "Though Tom Scrope isn't the man for every girl's money. Scrope Manor's a nice place: 'taint a bad match for her."

"Who was a talking anything about Tom Scrope, pray?" loftily demanded Susan. "'Tisn't *him*."

"No! Why who is it then?"

"Captain Clanwaring. That Trailing Indian *must* be a wood, for news, it must."

The revelation seemed to have some effect on Emma Geach. A piece of plum cake, being conveyed to her mouth, was summarily arrested half way; her face became of a burning red, and then changed to a deadly whiteness.

"Captain Clanwaring! It's not him that's going to marry Miss Arde!"

"Well, I'm sure! perhaps you know better than me," cried Susan. "It's Captain Jarvis Clanwaring, and nobody else, Emma Geach."

Emma Geach appeared to be making an effort to recover her surprise—or, at least, to hide it. She was eating away at the cake with a great show of appetite, and looking at it closely as if trying to count the plums.

"Once get away from a place for a few months, and all sorts o' changes takes place to surprise one," she said with an air of indifference. "Since when has *he* been a making up to her?"

"Since when," repeated Susan. "Well, it's a'most a twelvemonth since he asked her first. She'd have nothing to say to him then: no, nor for a long while after. He's got her now, though; leastways will have her Tuesday next: but I don't believe any man ever strove so hard for a girl yet, as the captain have strove for her."

"And a whole twelvemonth he have been a trying for her?" casually remarked Miss Emma.

"Ay," assented Susan. "And he had begun it in secret afore that: only he didn't dare to say nothing. I say, mother, have ye heered that Mr. Otto's to be his groomsman, through the heir not being able to come for 't?"

"Mr. Otto, is he?" returned the old mother. "I wish 'twas better weather, Susan: I'd ha' liked to walk to the church to see 'em married."

"Won't it be full!" was Susan's answering comment.

Thus, one topic succeeding to another, the sociable evening passed away. About eight o'clock Susan took her departure: absolutely forbidding either of the brothers to escort her. She'd not have 'em go wading through the snow that night, she said: and as her will had been law with them always, they obeyed her. Harry Cole was ten or twelve years younger than she, and Ham twenty.

So Susan set off alone. She had got a few yards down the road when she heard footsteps after her, floundering quickly through the snow. Believing that one of the two must be coming in spite of her injunction, she turned round, a sharp reprimand on her lips. But it proved to be Emma Geach.

"I just want to ask you something, Susan Cole," she said, her voice sunk to a whisper. "I had my reasons for not saying more afore 'em

at the forge. What did you mean by asking did I have a stormy passage over the sea, and how did I like Ireland?"

"Why shouldn't I ask it?" returned Susan. "It's Ireland you've been a stopping at, as all the world knows."

"I've not been a-nigh Ireland," said the girl earnestly.

"Not a-nigh Ireland!" echoed Susan, struck with the truthful accent. "Everybody said you went there."

"What for?"

"Well—'twas said you went with Mr. Tom Clanwaring from Bristol. Or else followed on over the sea after him."

Even in the starlight, Susan Cole could see the puzzled wonder that was spread on the girl's countenance. It seemed that just at first she did not understand the implication.

"Why what fools they must be!" she indignantly cried when the meaning dawned upon her. "They *couldn't* think it, Susan Cole."

"Everybody thought it; the whole parish, from one end on't to t'other, thought it," was Susan's answer. "And said it, too."

"Not everybody: 'twarn't possible. Not Black—nor Captain Clanwaring."

"Both o' *them* did," said Susan emphatically. "'Twas Black, I b'lieve, first spread it, and the captain retailed it after him. I've heered 'em both say it."

"They both knowed better."

A few minutes longer they talked together, regardless of the cold night and the depth of snow they stood in. Susan Cole went on her way at last with uplifted hands. She had heard something that nearly stunned her.

"May heaven have mercy on my poor young lady!" she groaned aloud to the frosty air. "What a sinner the man is!—what a good-for-nothing hypocrite! Letting the good name of another be blackened for his! Drat the ruts then!"

Paying no attention just then to where she put her feet, Susan had sunk into a drift of snow up to her knees. Getting out of it as she best could, she shook her legs and petticoats, and went on again. A great question lay on her mind: ought she to impart what she had just heard to her mistress?—or keep silence on the point now that the wedding was so near?

Perhaps what really turned the scale was Susan's love of gossip. With a story like this burning her tongue, it was next to an impossible task for her to keep silence. After Mrs. Arde went to her chamber for the night, she found it invaded by Susan.

The woman whispered her tale, the substance of what Emma Geach had said, standing with her mistress on the hearth-rug. As the red light played upon Mrs. Arde's face, Susan saw it take a pale hue, a haughty expression. That she was overwhelmed with dismayed indig-

nation at the first moment, was all too evident. The next, she had burst out laughing.

"The girl has been playing a trick upon you, Susan. How could you be so easily taken in? Captain Clanwaring indeed! Now, does it stand to reason?"

And, so prone to yield to persuasion is the human mind, that Susan Cole veered round to her mistress's impression. It called up her temper.

"The vile huzzy!—to try her tricks upon me! Let me come across her: that's all."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE WEDDING DAY.

SNOW, snow, nothing but snow. It lay on the ground as persistently as though it meant to stay with the world for ever. The tops of the houses at Worcester on one hand; the distant Malvern Hills on the other; the trees and hedges, the fields and dales intervening between each, and the whole vast surrounding landscape, presented a surface whiter than the whitest alabaster.

In the drawing-room at Mrs. Arde's was a motley company. Motley in regard to appearance. For, while some of them wore the gala attire suitable for a marriage, others presented quite an ordinary aspect. Take Captain Clanwaring, for instance: he was in the choicest of bridegroom's costume; May, on the contrary, had on a homely dress of ruby stuff. The Lady Lydia Clanwaring was resplendent in shining silk and lace: Mrs. Arde and her sister were in morning gowns. Otto Clanwaring was attired to match his brother: Charlotte Scrope, the bridesmaid, a very pretty young girl, was plain as the bride.

For this was Tuesday, the wedding morning; and the great question agitating those assembled, together with two or three other guests not necessary to mention, was—should the marriage take place, or not.

When the previous day, Monday, did not bring Mr. Arde, and it was likewise known that none of the London mails or other coaches, due some days now, had reached Worcester, the Hall fell into real consternation. Captain Clanwaring protested most strongly against the ceremony being delayed, even though Tuesday morning should not bring the Squire; but Mrs. Arde answered to this, sensibly enough, that without her husband there could be no marriage, as he was bringing the license with him. May said little on the Monday, for or against; nothing indeed; for she assumed to a certainty that she could not be married under these drawbacks.

The dinner had been held the previous night, and was somewhat of a failure in its master's absence. Some of the invited guests, too, could not get there for the snow. Mrs. Arde presided: and her sister, who was staying with them, helped her to make the best of it. And so Tuesday



came in, and had not brought the Squire. Mrs. Arde then despatched hasty messengers to as many friends bidden to the marriage as were within reach, to say it would not take place that day. Sir Dene was progressing favourably: but Mr. Priar, together with the physician called in from Worcester, enjoined the strictest quiet.

Captain Jarvis Clanwaring was on the wing early, on his part. While it was yet dark he quitted Beechhurst Dene, rode into Worcester, and procured a license. By ten o'clock he was at home again, somewhat sooner than he had hoped, and brought word that the weather was breaking-up.

"I cannot risk the chance of its being delayed even for a day," he observed in some agitation to his mother, as he went to attire himself for the ceremony. And my Lady Lydia answered, "Of course not:" though perhaps she had no idea of the imminent peril he was in. So Captain Clanwaring was driven to the Hall in full fig, the license in his hand; and my lady, with the rest of the company at Beechhurst Dene, speedily followed. His dismay was excessive when he found his bride not dressed, and Mrs. Arde quietly saying there could be no wedding that day.

"It is cruel, cruel!" spoke the captain to Mrs. Arde—and his agitation, that he could not quite disguise, spoke volumes in that lady's mind for the depth of his love. "There is no impediment now: here's the license: and perhaps by the time we are at the church Mr. Arde will be here, for the roads are undoubtedly becoming traversable. Don't, *don't* put off the wedding: it always brings ill-luck. Let May dress!"

Mrs. Arde glanced at her daughter, as much as to ask what her decision should be—at least, the sanguine captain so interpreted it. May, calm as the snow outside, and perhaps as cold, shook her head. "No, no," was all she said.

"But May, my dear May, surely—"

"No, not without papa," interrupted May, cutting short the bridegroom's remonstrance—and this time her voice took a tone of fear. "I will not be married in this uncertainty. My father may not be safe."

In Captain Clanwaring's angry vexation he gave vent to a word, spoken contemptuously. "Safe!" Recollecting himself on the instant, he softly implored her not to persist in her decision; not to invoke ill-luck upon their union. May remained quietly firm: and, to the captain's angry fancy, it almost seemed that she was glad of the respite.

At that moment, the church bells burst out, a merry peal. Mrs. Arde, though she had sent to the clergyman, had forgotten to send to the clerk. That functionary had gone to the church with the bell-ringers, expecting the wedding party every minute: and this was the result. Captain Clanwaring, unmindful of the cold, threw up the window at which they were standing.



"Listen, May! Surely you will not let them ring for nothing!"

"Indeed, and I think the wedding ought to be to-day, my dear," spoke up old Miss Clewer, from the depth of her large white quilted satin bonnet, and grey dress of twilled silk. "As my grand-nephew observes, a put-off wedding sometimes brings ill-luck: it has resulted, within my own knowledge, in there being none at all."

An awful suggestion for the bridegroom, flushing his pale face to a hot crimson. Lady Lydia came to the rescue: not attacking the decision of May, but of Mrs. Arde. But that lady proved to be as firm as her daughter. She had never had any intention of being otherwise.

"My dear Lady Lydia, you ask an impossibility. I hinted to Captain Clanwaring yesterday that the deeds of settlement were not signed: cannot be, until the arrival of Mr. Arde: and now you oblige me to speak out. Were it my daughter's own wish that the ceremony should be solemnised, I could not accede to it. She cannot marry until the completion of the settlements."

Mrs. Arde spoke very decisively. She had of course right on her side, and her child's interests to see to. Failing any settlement, all that May possessed would become the property of the gallant captain. Even he and his mother could not decently urge that. No more was to be said. It would only be putting off the wedding for a day, as everybody agreed; say until the morrow: now that the weather was breaking, a few hours would no doubt bring the Squire. Captain Clanwaring, terribly glumpy, had to submit: but he did it with a bad grace, not caring to conceal his mortification. As to the barrister, Otto, he had not spoken a word, for it or against it.

And so the bells, clanging out in their innocence, clanged out still, unconscious that there was no wedding to ring for. It had the effect of calling innumerable gazers to the church, from far and near. A report had gone about the previous night that perhaps the ceremony might be postponed if the Squire did not arrive: but when the bells were heard, it was assumed to be taking place.

"Do send to stop the bells, mamma!" pleaded May.

With her whole heart, Mrs. Arde wished her visitors would depart. It was an uncomfortable morning for her. No one seemed at ease; she least of any. Soon after twelve o'clock struck, when some of them were preparing to go, a party of morris-dancers came on to the lawn. Of course all stayed then, and crowded the windows to look.

"Harriet," whispered Mrs. Arde to her sister, "I cannot stand this longer; my nerves have been on the strain all the morning and are giving way. Do you play hostess for a bit."

She slipped out of the room, put on a warm shawl and hood, and made her way to the foot avenue, that ran beside the lawn and the approach to it. The snow had been swept, and she paced it thoughtfully,

lifting her face to the cold fresh air, and looking through the bare side branches at the morris-dancers. Fleet of foot and not ungraceful were those men ; their white attire was decorated with all kinds of coloured ribbons, that kept time and waved about to their steps and their staves. The figures were prolonged ; and the men did their best : at Arde Hall the morris-dancers were sure of a meal and a largesse, whenever it was a hard winter and they were shut out from their legitimate labour.

Though a tolerably common sight in those long-past winters, it was not a very frequent one, and idle spectators from the road were running in to gaze, quite a small crowd of them. The disappointed ones, who had been to the church and found no wedding, happened to be passing back again, and flocked in at the large gates. Mrs. Arde, pacing the solitary avenue, chanced to turn her attention from the dancers to these spectators, and saw amidst them Miss Emma Geach.

And yet, not exactly amidst them. They were thronging the gate and the railings before the lawn : this girl had drawn herself up close to the fence that skirted the side of the avenue, as if she did not care to be noticed. She stood there, leaning one arm against it, her old cloak muffled about her, and looking at the dancers with a listless air.

Obeying the moment's impulse, Mrs. Arde stepped through the beech trees and approached her. Putting aside the girl's naturally bold manners, Mrs. Arde always rather liked Emma Geach, and had pitied her isolated condition—isolated from all good associations—at the Trailing Indian. This alone might have caused her to accost the girl ; but she had another motive. At the time that communication was made to her by Susan Cole on Sunday night, Mrs. Arde had fully disbelieved it, regarding it as a foolish scandal on Captain Clanwaring : but since then, a *doubt*, a very ugly doubt, had insinuated itself ever and anon within her mind : and instinct now prompted her to set it at rest.

"Is it you, Emma ? I heard you were back."

"Yes, it's me," replied Emma, turning her head at the salutation. "I've been to the church to see the wedding, ma'am ; but it's said there is to be none."

"Not to-day. The Squire is absent."

"Can't get home for the choked-up roads," freely remarked Miss Emma. "I had a fine slow journey of it in the waggon."

"Where did you come from ?"

"Well, I came from Lunnon. No need to hide it, that I know of."

"Not from Ireland ?"

The girl's eyes flashed with quite an angry light. "Yes, I hear that *that* have been brought again me, but it's false as——"

"It has been said that when you left here you went to Bristol to join Mr. Tom Clanwaring," interrupted Mrs. Arde.

"When I left here I went straight to Lunnon town, as I was bid to go by him that led me wrong; and I've never been away from Lunnon till I took the waggon to come down here again."

Mrs. Arde gazed in the girl's face, reading it eagerly. There was a savage look in it, a passionate ring in her voice, that spoke too surely of the naked truth.

"It was Tom Clanwaring's name that was coupled with yours, you know, Emma, even before you left the place."

"Mrs. Arde, I never did know it. If I had, I bain't sure but I should ha' set it to rights then. 'Twas a shame on him for folks to say it. Mr. Tom!—why, he had always been as good as a brother to me from the time I was that high,"—slapping a lath that ran along the fence. "Leastways, as much o' one as a gentleman can be to a poor girl. Mr. Tom Clanwaring is just as good and noble and straight-for'ard, as t'other is a cheating and lying sneak. Black and him must ha' put their heads together, and laid it on Mr. Tom."

"The other being Jarvis Clanwaring?" spoke Mrs. Arde.

"Him, and none other: Jarvis Clanwaring. When he had got his turn served he just threw me over, Mrs. Arde. He did, the raskil: and I don't mind who knows it now. It's six months a'most since he've been to see me or sent me aught to get me a crust o' bread. I've been nigh upon starving. I might ha' starved outright but for a good woman whose room I lodged in: she helped me what she could."

"You are telling me the truth?" asked Mrs. Arde.

"It's the truth—as God hears me. I'd a mind to ha' told it out to Captain Clanwaring's face i' the church this morning when he was a being married; and I think I should ha' done't. 'Twas only the thought o' one thing might ha' stopped me—and that's the trouble and pain 'twould ha' gave Miss May. When I heard 'twas him she was a going to marry I pitied her a'most to crying; a good-for-nothing knave like him can't bring her much good."

"You should have told of this before to-day, for Miss May's sake," said Mrs. Arde, sharply.

"I knew nought about the wedding till the night afore last," spoke the girl; "I never knew as he was living down at Beechhurst Dene. He let me think he was about in places, a serving with his regiment: but it seems he have sold out on't."

"Where is the baby?" whispered Mrs. Arde.

"It died when it was born, ma'am. And a lucky thing too. Jarvis Clanwaring, grand as the world thinks him, is just a bad man, Mrs. Arde, made up o' deceit and heartlessness. Bring me to him, and I'll say it to his face. He have been up to his ears in debt, too, this long while. Perhaps you didn't know o' that, either."

Mrs. Arde made no answer. The morris-dancers had brought their performance to an end; and the spectators were coming away.

Perhaps Mrs. Arde did not care to be seen talking to Emma Geach : for she wished her good morning, and turned towards home. What she had heard three parts stunned her. May came into her chamber almost as she was entering it.

"Mamma," she cried, her face pale, her voice beseeching, "you will not let this wedding take place before papa returns? Promise me ! Captain Clanwaring is saying——"

"Be at rest, May," interrupted Mrs. Arde, bending to kiss her. "You shall certainly not marry before your father is here."

And the very emphatic tone, telling of strange anger, a little surprised Miss May.

Careering into the Faithful city of Worcester, the coachman driving his four fine horses at a somewhat faster speed than their usual majestic pace, the guard's horn blowing blasts of importance, went the Royal Mail. Along Sidbury, up College Street and High Street, through the Cross, and on to the Foregate Street ; where it finally drew up before the two principal inns of the town, the Hoppole and the Star-and-Garter. People had run out at their shop doors to see it pass ; a small crowd collected round it almost before it stopped : for it was the first mail that had reached Worcester since the detention. The supposition prevailing was, that it was the mail known to have been so long on the road, the one that started from London the past Friday. The curious people, running up, were eager to learn what it had been doing with itself, and where the detention had been. Quite a chorus of questions assailed the guard and coachman as they descended from their seats : and then it was discovered that this was not the lost mail at all, but the regular mail that had made the journey in due course and without much delay ; having quitted the Bull and Mouth the previous afternoon. In the check their curiosity sustained, they began to walk off again one by one. This was Wednesday morning.

The mail brought but one passenger : a sharp-looking active man, who leaped out of the inside, and had no luggage with him. He was a little stared at. It was concluded that his business must be of importance, to travel in that ungenial weather and risk being buried in the snow on the road.

"Didn't ye see nor hear nothing o' that there lost mail, that have been so long a coming?" questioned a bystander of the guard.

"No ; nothing. It passed Woodstock, and it didn't get to Chipping Norton ; so must be somewhere between the two places," was the guard's answer. "But whether it's above ground, or dead and buried below the snow, and its folks dead and buried with it, is more than I can say."

"Had you much difficulty in getting along, guard?" questioned a gentleman.

"No, sir. The worst was between Woodstock and Evesham. In places there we a'most stuck fast; but——"

"Can I charter a horse and gig from this hotel, guard? I want one immediately."

The interruption, spoken in a sharp, gruff, imperative tone, came from the passenger. Finding that he could charter a horse and gig, he ordered it to be got ready without any delay, and ran into the Star to drink half a glass of brandy-and-water.

"Wouldn't you like some breakfast, sir?—or luncheon?" asked the barmaid.

"I have not time for either."

The gig came to the door, together with a man whom the traveller had requested should accompany him: a tall, strong young fellow belonging to the Star-and-Garter stables. The landlord came out to see them start.

"Have you far to go?" he asked.

"About three or four miles, I fancy," was the reply. "I am a stranger in these parts."

Away they started; he taking the reins himself, and whipping the horse into a canter; turning down Broad Street, onwards over the Severn bridge, and so out of the town that way. In due course of time he came to the neighbourhood of Beechhurst Dene, and there arrested Mr. Jarvis Clanwaring. It was accomplished without the slightest trouble.

On the Tuesday evening a note had been delivered to Captain Clanwaring at Beechhurst Dene from Mrs. Arde. It stated in unmistakably decisive terms that until the return of Mr. Arde there would be no marriage; all things must remain in abeyance. The captain could do nothing—save relieve his feelings by a fit of hot swearing in his chamber. On the following morning there was still no Mr. Arde; but in the course of it Captain Clanwaring walked over to the Hall. He did not get to see the ladies—which he considered very strange. Susan Cole brought him a message that Miss May was very poorly with a headache ("and not to be wondered at!" put in Susan in a parenthesis), and her mistress was busy writing letters. So Captain Clanwaring, rather discomfited, took his way back home again. He was crossing the upper road in a sauntering kind of manner, his eyes moodily bent on the ground to pick his way over the snow, which was still lying there, when a passing gig came to a sudden standstill, its driver leaped down, and Jarvis Clanwaring, gentleman and ex-captain, found himself in custody.

"Curse you, Rilling!" was all he said, gnashing his teeth with impotent rage. For he knew the capturer very well.

"'Twould have been done an hour or two earlier, captain, but for the snow keeping the mail back," was the man's equable answer. "A fine tether you've had of it altogether."

The arrest was for a very large sum of money, and it was of no use to fight against it. Persuasion and resistance would alike be futile, as the unfortunate captain knew. Fate is stronger than we are. The public arrest had been witnessed by at least two people, one of whom chanced to be Mark, the servant at the Hall, the other, Sam Pound; and the news went about with a whirr.

The captor and the captured, the gig and the supernumerary, proceeded to Beechhurst Dene. Jarvis was in an awful fever to get free: we should have been so in his place. There was only one way by which it could be accomplished—the paying of the money; or else by bail that was as good as money. It was possible, though not very probable, that Sir Dene might have settled the matter could he have been appealed to: but the state in which Sir Dene was lying, partially if not quite insensible, put any appeal to him out of the question. The heir, Dene, was not there; nobody was there, but the barrister.

"You will give bail for me, Otto?" said the crest-fallen captain, who felt as if he would very much like to shoot somebody—perhaps himself.

"Couldn't take Mr. Otto Clanwaring's bail," interposed Mr. Rilling, gruffly: for nature had endowed him with an uncommonly gruff voice. "Couldn't accept anybody's undertaking, except the baronet's, Sir Dene."

"But Sir Dene is ill, you hear; paralysed," remonstrated the unhappy captain.

"Yes, captain. More's the pity for you."

"If my brother gives you his undertaking it will be as sure as Sir Dene's, Rilling," urged the captain. "He ——"

"I could not give it, Jarvis," interposed the cautious barrister. "You must know that I am not in a position to take a debt upon me that might prove an incubus for my lifetime. And where should I get the money from, do you suppose, if called upon to pay it?"

"It will stop my marriage," breathed Jarvis, biting his feverish lips. "I have been looking to that to save me from this gulf. Those cursed roads! But for Arde's delay, I should have been married and safely away. Otto! stretch a point for me."

"The counsellor's promise would be of no more worth than yours, captain—begging pardon of him for saying it," reiterated the sheriff's officer. "Besides, there's more behind this," was the candid avowal.

As Otto Clanwaring had felt fully sure of. If this one debt on which Jarvis was arrested were settled, a host of others, on which judgment had been obtained, lay behind it. In fact, it was pretty plain that Captain Clanwaring's career was for the time over.

"And my marriage?" he groaned. "What's to become of that?"

"You could not think of marrying Miss Arde now, though you were free," urged Otto in his strictness. "At least, without informing them



of the facts. It would be a most dishonourable thing, so to deceive the Arde family."

"Hold your cant," retorted the exasperated prisoner.

There was no loophole of escape for him; none. In later weeks, when Sir Dene was cognisant of the affair and able to converse upon it, he said that Jarvey's sins had come home to him. Mr. Rilling and the extra man and the captain all took their departure together in the gig; the latter wedged securely in between the two others.

When the Lady Lydia Clanwaring got home towards dinner-time—for she, with Miss Ann Clewer and Mrs. Letsom, finding there would be no wedding that day, had driven over to spend it in Worcester—she found what had taken place. Her beloved son, of whom she had made a very idol, and would have willingly offered up all the rest of the world in sacrifice at his shrine, had been ignominiously conveyed away a prisoner; and was even then on his road by night coach to be lodged in one of the gaols of the metropolis! My lady raised the house with her frantic cries.

Somebody else got home the same evening—and that was Squire Arde. For the long-detained mail had contrived to free itself that day, and reached Worcester at last: causing a hubbub and congratulation that some of the old citizens may yet remember. The first thing the Squire heard when inside his own doors, was—the news of Captain Clanwaring's arrest, and of his heavy embarrassments. Many-tongued rumour had been exceedingly busy with the unfortunate captain's fame all the afternoon; and facts, hitherto unsuspected, had come out in a remarkable manner.

Captain Clanwaring arrested!—and taken off a prisoner to the Fleet!—and over head and shoulders in debt and embarrassment! Captain Clanwaring, who but for those heavy snow drifts would now be Mary's husband! Squire Arde turned hot and cold as he listened.

What an escape it was for Mary! How Jarvis Clanwaring had managed to stave off the evil day so long and to conceal the true state of things, was a mystery. The selling of the commission had been forced. It was a stop-gap for the time; since then, Lady Lydia and others had helped him, including those harpies, the London money-lenders. The indignant Squire found that his daughter's money was indeed required, that there was urgent need of the marriage being hastened on.

"What an escape!" aspirated the Squire in solemn thankfulness. "And I—Heaven forgive me!—murmured rebelliously at the delay caused by the snow-storm, little thinking that it was the saving of my child! Perhaps God sent that detention expressly in His love for her!"

Within the privacy of their own chamber that night, sitting over the fire, Mrs. Arde whispered another item of news in her husband's ear—



that which was connected with Miss Emma Geach. For some little time the Squire would not take it in : but when convinced of its truth, he began stamping about the room in wrath so great and loud, that poor Mrs. Arde was fain to beg him to be still, lest the household should think he was beating her.

"Let 'em think it !" roared the Squire. "The desperate villain !— And he would have made a wife of my innocent child !"

Hardly giving time for morning dawn well to set in, the Squire stamped up to the Trailing Indian, to "have it out" with Black. He told that worthy innkeeper that he was a base villain, not a shade better than the other villain ; that they had sacrificed the good name of Tom Clanwaring, and nearly sacrificed the life's happiness of Miss Arde.

And she, Mary Arde : how did she take the disappointment relative to her marriage ?—To most young ladies the breaking off of a marriage is, to say the least of it, mortifying. Not so to Mary Arde. She was as one released from a weight of despair. She warbled about the house like a freed bird. Susan Cole, who could not have kept her tongue silent had she been paid to do it, disclosed to her lots of things. The lightness came back to Mary's steps, the colour to her cheeks : it was as if some special happiness had fallen on her heart from Heaven.

"She could not have liked him !" cried the wondering Squire to his wife.

"She did not," said Mrs. Arde. "I fear she liked Tom Clanwaring too well for that."

The Squire frowned a hideous frown at the unwelcome name. Though Tom had been shamefully aspersed, and been proved innocent where he had been thought guilty, he was not the less ineligible to be "liked" by May. "And never will be," spoke the Squire hotly.

And that poor neglected scapegoat was never so much as thought of by the world, or by Beechhurst Dene. Tom Clanwaring was in the place deemed most appropriate for him : some remote district of Irish bog, working out his sins.

*(To be continued.)*

## OUR STRIKE.

IT was in September, and they were moving to Crabb Cot for a week or two's shooting. The shooting was not bad about there, and the Squire liked a turn with his gun yet. Being close on the Michaelmas holidays, Tod and I were with them.

When the stay was going to be short, the carriages did not come over from Dyke Manor. On arriving at South Crabb station, there was a fly waiting. It would not take us all. Mr. and Mrs. Todhetley, the two children, and Hannah got into it, and some of the luggage was put atop.

"You two boys can walk," said the Pater. "It'll stretch your legs." And a great deal rather, too, than be boxed up in a crawling fly!

We took the way through Crabb Lane: the longest but merriest, being always alive with noise and dirt. Reports had come abroad long before that Crabb Lane was "out on strike:" Tod and I thought we'd take a look at it in this new aspect.

There were some great works in the vicinity—I need not state here their exact speciality—and those employed at them chiefly inhabited Crabb Lane. It was the setting-up of these works that caused the crowded dwellings in Crabb Lane to be built—for where a mass of workmen come congregating together, dwellings must follow.

You have heard of Crabb Lane before—in connection with what I once told you about Harry Lease the pointsman. It was a dingy, overpopulated, bustling place, prosperous on the whole, and its folks as a rule well-to-do. A strike was quite a new feature, bringing to most of them a fresh experience in life. England had strikes in those past days, but they were not common.

Crabb Lane during working hours had hitherto been given over to the children, who danced in the gutters and cried and screamed themselves hoarse. Women also would be out of doors, idling away their time in gossip; or else calling across to each other from the windows. But now, as I and Tod went down it, things looked different. Instead of women and children, men were there. Every individual man, I believe, out of every house the lane contained; for there looked to be shoals of them. They lounged idly against the walls, or stood about in groups. Some with pipes, some without; some laughing and jeering, apparently in the highest of spirits, as if they were at the top of fortune's tree; some silent and anxious-looking.

"Well, Hoar, how are you?"

It was Tod who spoke. The man he addressed, Jacob Hoar, was one of the best of the workmen: a sober, steady, honest fellow, with a big frame and resolute face. He had the character of being fierce in temper, sometimes savage with his fellow men, if put out. Alfred Hoar

—made pointsman at the station in poor Harry Lease's place—was his brother.

Hoar did not answer Tod at all. He was standing quite alone near the door of his house, a strangely defiant look upon his pale face, and his firm lips drawn in. Unless I was mistaken, some of the men over the way were taking covert glances at him, as though he were a kangaroo they had to keep aloof from. Hoar turned his eyes slowly upon us; took off his round felt hat (which had got a notch in the brim), and smoothed back his dark hair.

"I be as well as matters 'll let me be, young Mr. Todhetley," he said then.

"There's a strike going on, I hear," said Tod. "Has been for some time."

"Yes, there's a strike a-going on," assented Hoar, speaking all the while in a deliberate, sullen manner, as a man resenting some special grievance. "Has been for some time, as you say. And I don't know when the strike 'll be a-going off."

"How is Eliza?" I asked.

"Much as usual, Mr. Johnny. What should ail her?"

Evidently there was no sociability to be got out of Jacob Hoar that afternoon; and we left him. A few yards further, we passed Ford, the baker's. No end of heads were propelling themselves out of the shop door, and *they* seemed to be staring at Hoar.

"He must have been dealing out a little abuse to the public generally, Tod."

"Very likely," answered Tod. "He seems to be bursting with some rage or another."

"Nay, I don't think it's so much rage as vexation. Something must have gone wrong."

"Well, perhaps so."

"Look here, Tod. If we had a home to keep up and a lot of mouths to feed and weekly rent to pay, and a strike stopped the supplies, we might be in a worse humour than Hoar is."

"Right, Johnny." And Tod went off at a strapping pace.

How it may be with other people, I don't know: but when I get back to a place after an absence, I want to see everybody, and am apt to go dashing in at doors without warning.

"It won't take us a minute to look in on Miss Timmens, Tod," I said, as we came near the schoolhouse. "She'll tell us the news of the whole parish."

"Take the minute, then," said Tod. "I'm not going to bother myself with Miss Timmens."

Neither perhaps should I, after that; but in passing the door it was pulled wide open by one of the little scholars. Miss Timmens sat in her chair, the lithe, thin cane (three yards long) raised in her hand, its

other end descending, gently enough, on the shoulder of a chattering girl.

"I don't keep it to beat 'em," Miss Timmens was wont to say of her cane, "but just to tap 'em into attention when they are beyond the reach of my hand." And, to give her her due, it was nothing more.

"It's you, is it, Master Johnny? I heard you were all expected."

"It's me, safe enough. How goes the world with you, Miss Timmens?"

"Cranky," was the short answer. "South Crabb's going out of its senses, I think. The parson is trying to introduce fresh ways and doings in my school: new-fangled rubbish, Master Johnny, that'll cause more harm than good: I won't have it, and so him and me are at daggers drawn. And there's a strike took hold of the place!"

I nodded. While she spoke, it had struck me, looking at the room, that it was not so full as usual.

"It's the strike does that," she said, in a kind of triumph. "It's the strike that works all the ill and every kind of evil"—and it was quite evident the strike found no more favour with her than the parson's attempted fresh ways.

"But what has the strike to do with the children's coming to school?"

"The strike has carried all the children's best things to the pawnshop, and they've nothing decent left to come abroad in. That's one cause, Johnny Ludlow," she concluded, very tartly.

"Is there any other?"

"Don't you think that sufficient? I am not going to let them appear before me in rags—and so Crabb Lane knows. But there is another cause, sir. This strike has so altered the course of things that the whole order of ord'nary events is turned upside down. If the young ones' frocks were at home again, it's ten to one against their coming to school."

"I don't see the two little Hoars." And why I had been looking for those particular children I can't say, unless it was that Hoar and his peculiar manner had been floating in my mind ever since we passed him.

"Liza and Jessy—no, but they've been here till to-day," was the reply, given after a long pause. "Are you going, Mr. Johnny?—I'll just step outside with you."

She drew the door close behind her, keeping the handle in her hand, and threw her eyes straight into my face.

"Jacob Hoar has gone and beat his boy a'most to death this morning—and the strike's the cause of *that*," she whispered, emphatically.

"Jacob Hoar has!—Why, how came he to do it?" I exclaimed, recalling more forcibly than ever the curious look of the man, and the

curious looks of the other men holding back from him. "Which of his boys is it?"

"The second of 'em; little Dick. Yes, he is black and blue all over, they say; next door to beat to death; and his arm broken. And they've got the strike to thank for it."

She repeated the concluding words more stingingly than before. That Miss Timmens was wroth with the strike, there could be no mistake. I asked her why the strike was to be thanked for the beating and the broken arm.

"Because the strike has brought misery; and *that* is the source of all the ill going on just now in Crabb Lane," was her reply. "When the men threw themselves out of work, of course they threw themselves out of wages. Some funds have been furnished to them, weekly, I believe, from the Trades Union League—or whatever they call the thing—but it seems a mere nothing compared to what they used to earn. Household goods, as well as clothes, have been going to the pawn-shop; but they have now pledged all they've got to pledge, and are, it is said, in sore straits: mothers and fathers and children alike hungry. It's some time now since they've had enough to eat. Fancy that, Mr. Johnny!"

"But why should Dicky be beaten for that?" I persisted, trying to keep her to the point—a rather difficult matter with Miss Timmens at all times. •

"It was in this way," she answered, dropping her voice to a lower key, and giving a pull at the door to make sure it had not opened. "Dicky, poor fellow, is half starved; he's not used to it, and feels it keenly: resents it, I dare say. This morning, when out in the lane, he saw a tray of halfpenny buns, hot from the oven, put on old Ford's counter. The sight was too much for him, the temptation too great. Dicky Hoar's naturally honest; he has been, up to now, at all events; but I suppose hunger was stronger than honesty to-day. He crept into the shop on all fours, abstracted a bun with his fingers, and was creeping out again, when Ford pounced upon him, bun in hand. There was a fine outcry. Ford was harsh, roared out for the policeman, and threatened him with jail; and in the midst of the commotion Hoar came up. In his mortification at hearing that a boy of his had been caught thieving, he seized upon a thick stick that a by-stander happened to have, and laid it unmercifully upon poor Dick."

"And broke his arm?"

"And broke his arm. And covered him with weals beside. He'll be all manner of colours by to-morrow."

"What a brutal fellow Hoar must be!"

"To beat him like that?—well, yes," assented Miss Timmens, in an accent that bore rather a dubious sound: "passion must have blinded him and drove him further than he intended. The man has always

been upright; prided himself on being so, as one may say; and there's no doubt that to find his child could be a thief shook him cruelly. This strike is ruining the tempers of the men; it makes them feel at war with everything and everybody."

When I got home I found them in the thick of the news also, for Cole the doctor was there, and told it. Mrs. Todhetley, sitting on the sofa with her bonnet untied and her shawl unpinned, was listening in a kind of amazed horror.

"But surely the arm cannot be *broken*, Mr. Cole!" she urged.

"Broken just above the wrist, ma'am. I ought to know, for I set it. Wicked little rascal, to steal the bun! As to Hoar, he is as fierce as a tiger when really enraged."

"Well, it sounds very shocking."

"So it does," said Cole. "I think perhaps it may be productive of one good—keep the boy from picking and stealing to the end of his life."

"He was hungry, you say."

"Famished, ma'am. Most of the young ones in Crabb Lane are so just now."

The Squire was walking up and down the room, his hands in his pockets. He halted, and turned to face the doctor.

"Look here, Cole—what has brought this state of things about? A strike!—and prolonged! Why, I should as soon have expected to hear the men had thrown up their work to become Merry Andrews! Who is in fault?—the masters or the men?"

Cole lifted his eyebrows. "The masters lay the blame on the men, the men lay it on the masters."

"What is it they are holding out for?"

"To get more wages, and to do less work."

"Oh, come, that's a twofold demand, that is," cried the Pater. "Modest folks generally ask for one favour at a time. Meanwhile things are all at sixes and sevens, I suppose, in Crabb Lane."

"Ay," said the doctor. "At worse than sixes and sevens, indoors and out of it. There's empty cupboards and empty rooms in; and a good deal of what's bad out. It's the wives and children that suffer, poor things."

"The men must be senseless to throw themselves out of work!"

"The men only obey orders," cried Mr. Cole. "There's a spirit of disaffection abroad: certain people have constituted themselves into rulers, and they say to the men, 'You must do this,' and 'You must not do that.' The men have yielded themselves up to be led, and *do* do what they are told, right or wrong."

"I don't say they are wrong to try and get more wages if they can; 'twould be odd if we were to be debarred from bettering ourselves," spoke the Squire. "But to throw up their work while they do it, there's



the folly : there's where the pinching shoe must tighten. Let them keep on their work while they agitate."

"They'd tell you, I expect, that the masters would be less likely to listen then than they are now."

"Well, they've no right, in common-sense, to throw up their wives' and children's living, if they do their own," concluded the Squire.

Cole nodded. "There's some truth in that," he said as he got up to leave. "Any way, things are more gloomy with us than you'd believe, Squire."

In the first story I, Johnny Ludlow, ever wrote for you, called "Shaving the Ponies' Tails," I told how, when I was a little child of four years old, Hannah my nurse, and Eliza, one of her fellow servants, commented freely in my hearing on my father's second marriage, and shook me well because I was wise enough to understand them. Eliza was then housemaid at the Court, my father's home ; and soon after this she had left it to marry Jacob Hoar. She was a nice kind of young woman (in spite of the shaking), and I kept up a great acquaintance with her and was free, so to say, of her house in Crabb Lane, running in and out of it at will. A tribe of little Hoars arrived, one after another. Jacky, the eldest, over ten now, had a place of some sort at the works, and earned two shillings a week. "Twarn't much," said Hoar the father, "but 'twas bringing his hand in." Dick, the second, he who had just got the beating, was nine ; two girls were next, and there was a young boy of three.

Hoar earned capital wages—to judge by the comfortable way they lived : I should think not less than forty shillings a week. Of course they spent it all, every fraction ; as a rule, families of that class never put by for a rainy day. They might have done it, I suppose : in those days provisions were nothing like as dear as they are now ; the cost of living altogether was less.

I did not like to hear of empty cupboards in connection with Eliza ; no, nor of her boy's broken arm ; and in the evening I went back to Crabb Lane to see her. They lived next door but one to the house that had been Lease's ; but theirs was far better than that tumble-down thing. A little parlour in front, a kitchen behind, and sleeping-rooms above.

Well, it was a change ! The pretty parlour looked half dismantled. Its ornaments and better things had gone, as Miss Timmens expressed it, to ornament the pawn-shop. The carpet also. Against the wall on a small mattress lay Dicky and his bruises. Some of the children sat on the floor : Mrs. Hoar was kneeling over Dicky and bathing his cheek, which was big enough for two, for it had caught the stick kindly.

"Well, Eliza !"

She got up, sank into a chair, flinging her apron over her face, and

burst into tears. I suppose it was at the sight of me. Not knowing what to say to that, I pulled the little girls' ears and then sat down on the floor by Dicky. *He* began to cry.

"Oh come, Dick, don't; you'll soon be better. Face smarts, does it?"

"I never thought to meet you like this, Master Johnny," said Eliza then, getting up and speaking through her sobs. "'Twas hunger made him do it, sir; nothing else. They be so famished at times it a'most takes the sense out of 'em."

"Yes, I am sure it was nothing else. Look up, Dick. Don't cry like that." One would have thought the boy was going into sobbing hysterics.

I had an apple in my pocket and gave it to him. He kept it in his hand for some time and then began to eat it ravenously, sobbing now and then. The left arm, the one that was broken, lay across him, bound up in splints.

"I didn't mean to steal the bun," he whispered, looking up at me through his tears. "I'd ha' give Mrs. Ford the first ha'penny for it I'd ever got. I was all a-hungered, I was. We be always a-hungered now."

"It is hard times with you, I'm afraid, Eliza," I said, standing by her.

Opening her mouth to answer, a sob caught her breath and her side—she suddenly put her hand upon the latter. Her poor face, naturally patient and meek, was worn, and had a spot of bright hectic. Eliza used to be very pretty and was young-looking still, with smooth brown hair, nice features, and mild grey eyes: she looked very haggard now and less tidy. But, as to being tidy, how can folks be that, when all their gowns worth a crown are hanging up at the pawn-shop?

"It's dreadful times, Master Johnny. It's times that frighten me. Worse than all, I can't see when it's to end, and what the end's to be."

"Don't lose heart. The end will be that the men will go to work again; I dare say, soon."

"The Lord send it!" she answered. "That's the best we can hope for, sir; and that'll be hard enough. For we shall have to begin life again, as 'twere; with debts all around us, and our household things and our clothes in pledge."

"You'll get them out again then."

"Ay; but how long 'll it take to earn the money to do it? This strike, as I look upon it, has took at the rate of five years of prosperity out of our lives, Master Johnny."

"The league—or whatever it is—allows you all money to live, does it not?"

"We get some, sir. It's not a great deal. They tell us that there's strikes a-going on in many parts just now; they have to be helped as

well as the operatives here; and so it makes the allowance small. We've no means of knowing whether that's true or not, us women I mean; but I dare say it is."

"And the allowance is not enough to keep you in food?"

"Master Johnny, there's so many other things one wants, beside bare food," she answered, with a sigh. "We must pay our rent, or the landlord 'ud turn us out: we must have a bit o' coal for firing: we must have soap; clothes must be washed, sir, and we must be washed: we must have a candle these dark evenings: shoes must be mended: and there's other trifles, too, that I needn't go into, as well as what Hoar takes for himself——"

"But does he take much?" I interrupted, the item striking me.

"No, sir, he don't: nothing to what some of 'em takes: he has always been a good husband and father. The men, you see, sir, must have a sixpence or two in their pockets to pay for their smoke, and that, at their meetings in the evening. There's not much left for food when all this comes to be taken out—and we are seven mouths to fill."

No wonder they were hungry!

"Some of the people you've known ought to help you, Eliza. Mrs. Stirling at the old home might: or Mrs. Coney. Do they?"

Eliza Hoar shook her head. "The gentlemen be all again us, sir, and so the ladies dare not. As to Mrs. Stirling—I don't know that she has so much as heard of the strike—all them miles off."

"You mean the gentlemen are against the strike?"

"Yes, sir: dead again it. They say strikes is the worst evil that can set in, both for us and for the country: that it 'll increase the poor-rates to a height to be afraid of, and in the end drive the work away from the land. Sitting here with my poor children around me at dusk to save candle, I get thinking sometimes that the gentlemen may not be far wrong, Master Johnny."

Seeing the poor quiet faces lifted to me, from which every bit of spirit seemed to be gone, I wished I had my pockets full of buns for them. But buns were not likely to be there; and of money I had none: the buying of one of the best editions of Shakespeare had just cleared me out.

"Where's Hoar?" I asked, in leaving.

A hot flush came over her face. "He has not shown himself here, Master Johnny, since what he did to *him*," was her resentful answer, pointing to Dick. "Afraid to face me, he is."

"I'd not say too much to him, Eliza. It could not undo what's done, and might only make matters worse. I dare say Hoar is just as much vexed about it as you are."

"It's to be hoped he is! Why did he go and set upon the child in that cruel way? It's the men that goes in for the strike; 't isn't us: and when the worry of it makes 'em so low they hardly know where to

turn, they must vent it upon us. Master Johnny, there's times now when I could wish myself dead but for the children."

I went home with my head full of a scheme—the getting Mrs. Todhetley and perhaps the Coneys to do something for poor Eliza Hoar. But I soon found I might as well have pleaded the cause of the public hangman.

Who should come into our house that evening but old Coney himself. As if the strike were burning a hole in his tongue, he began upon it before he was well seated, and gave the Squire his version of it: that is, his opinion. It did not differ in substance from what had been hinted at by Eliza Hoar. Mr. Coney did not speak *for* the men or *against* them; he did not speak for or against the masters: that question of conflicting interests he was content to leave: but what he did urge, and very strongly, was, that strikes in themselves must be productive of an incalculable amount of harm: they brought misery on the workmen, pecuniary embarrassment on the masters, and they most inevitably would, if persisted in, eventually ruin the trade of the kingdom; therefore they should, by every possible means, be discouraged. The Squire, in his hot fashion, took up these opinions for his own and enlarged upon them.

When old Coney was gone and we had our slippers on, I told them of my visit to Eliza, and asked them to help her just a little.

"Not by a crust of bread, Johnny," said the Squire, more firmly and quietly than he usually spoke. "Once begin to assist the wives and children, and the men would have so much the less urgent need of bringing the present state of things to an end."

"I am so sorry for Eliza, sir."

"So am I, Johnny. But the proper person to be sorry for her is her husband: her weal and woe can lie only with him."

"If we could help her ever so little!"

The Squire looked at me for a full minute. "Attend to me, Johnny Ludlow. Once for all, NO! The strike, as Coney says, must be discouraged by every means in our power. Discouraged, Johnny. Otherwise they may grow to an extent of which no man can foresee the end. They'll bring the workman to one of two things—starvation, or the workhouse. Our poors'-rates are getting higher every day: what do you suppose they'll come to if this is to go on? I'd be glad for the men to get better pay if they are underpaid now: whether they are or not, I cannot tell: but rely upon it, striking work is not the way to attain to it. It's a way that has ruined many a hopeful workman, who otherwise would have gone on contentedly to the end of his days; ay, and has finally killed him. It will ruin many another. Various interests are at stake in this: you must perceive it for yourself, lad, if you've got any brains: but none so great as that of the workmen themselves. With all my heart I wish, for their own sakes, they had not taken this extreme step."

"And if the poor children starve, sir?"

"Fiddlestick to starving! They need not starve while there's a work-house to go to. *Can't* you see how all this acts, Mr. Johnny? The men throw themselves out of work, and when matters come to extremity the parish must feed the children, and we, the rate-payers, must pay. A pleasant prospect! How many scores of children are there in Crabb Lane alone? Let the men look to their families' needs. For their own sakes; I repeat it; for their own best interests, I'll have them let alone. They have entered on this state of things of their own free will, and they must themselves fight it out.—And now get you off to bed, boys."

"The Pater's right, Johnny," cried Tod, stepping into my room as we went up, his candle flaring like ten in the draught from the open staircase window; "right as right can be on principle; but it *is* hard for the women and children——"

"It's hard for themselves, too, Tod: only they've got the unbending spirit of Britons, to hold out to the death and make no bones over it."

"I wish you'd not interrupt a fellow," growled Tod. "Look here: I've got four-and-sixpence, every farthing I can count just now. You take it, and give it to Eliza. The Pater need know nothing."

He emptied his trousers pocket of the silver, and went off with his candle. I'm not sure but that he and I both enjoyed the state of affairs as something new. Had anybody told us a year ago that our quiet neighbourhood could be disturbed by a public ferment, we'd never have believed it.

The next morning I went over with the four-and-sixpence. Perhaps it was not quite fair to give it, after what the Squire had said—but there's many a worse thing than that done daily in the world. Eliza caught up her breath when I gave it her, and thanked me with her eyes as well as her lips. She had on a frightfully old green gown—green once—shabby and darned and patched, no cap, and was on her knees wiping up some spilt water on the floor.

"Mind, Eliza, you must not say a word to any one. I should get into no end of a row."

"You were always generous, Master Johnny. Even when a baby——"

"Never mind that. It's not I that am generous now. The silver was given me for you by somebody else: I'm cleared out, myself. Where's Dicky?"

"He's upstairs in his bed, sir; too stiff to move. Mr. Cole, too, said he would as well lie there to-day. Would you like to go up and see him?"

As I ran up the staircase, open from the room, a vision of her wan face followed me—of the catching sob again—of the smooth brown

hair which she was pressing from her temples. We've heard talk of a peck of troubles : she seemed to have a bushel.

Dicky was a sight : as far as variety of colours went, he might have gone and shown himself off as a walking church window. There was no mistake about his state of stiffness.

"It won't last long, Dick ; and then you'll be as well as ever."

Dick's grey eyes—they were just like his mother's—looked up at mine. I thought he was going to cry.

"There. You'll never take anything again, will you ?"

Dick shook his head as emphatically as his starched condition allowed. "Father says as he'd kill me next time if I did."

"When did he say that ?"

"This morning : afore he went out."

Dicky's room had a lean-to roof, and was about the size of our jam closet at Crabb Cot. Not an earthly article was in it but the mattress he was lying on.

"Who sleeps here besides you, Dicky ?"

"Jacky and little Sam. Liza and Jessie sleeps by father and mother."

"Well, good day, Dicky."

Who should I come upon at the end of Crabb Lane, but the Squire and Hoar. The Squire had his gun in his hand and was talking his face red : Hoar leaned against the wooden palings that skirted old Massock's garden, and looked as sullen as he had looked yesterday. I thought the Pater had been blowing him up for beating the boy ; but it seemed that he was blowing him up for the strike. Cole the surgeon, hurrying along on his rounds, stopped just as I did.

"Not your fault, Hoar ! Of course I know it's not your fault alone, but you are as bad as the rest. Come : tell me what good the strike has done for you."

"Not much as yet," readily acknowledged Hoar, in a tone of incipient defiance.

"To me it seems nothing less than a crime to throw yourself out of work. There's the work ready to your hands, *spoiling* for want of being done—and yet you won't do it !"

"I do but obey orders," said Hoar : who seemed to be miserable enough, in spite of the incipient defiance.

"But is there any sense in it ?" reasoned the Squire. "If you men could drop the work and still keep up your homes and their bread-and-cheese and their other comforts, I'd say nothing. But look at your poor suffering wives and children. I should be *ashamed* to be idle, when my idleness bore such consequences."

The man answered nothing. Cole put in his word.

"There are times when I feel I should like to run away from my work and go in for a few weeks' or months' spell of idleness, Jacob Hoar ; and drink my two or three glasses of port wine after dinner of



a day, like a lord; and be altogether independent of my patients, and of every other obligation under the sun. But I can't. I know what it would do for *me*—bring me to the parish."

"D'ye think we throw up the work for the sake o' being idle?" returned Hoar. "D'ye suppose, sirs,"—with a great burst of a sigh—"that this state o' things is a *pleasure* to us? We are doing it for future benefit. We are told by them who act for us, and who know, that great benefit will come of it if we be only firm, that our rights be in our own hands if we only persevere long enough in standing out for 'em. Us men has our rights, I suppose, as well as other folks."

"Those who, as you term it, act for you may be mistaken, Hoar," said the Squire. "I'll leave that: and go on to a different question. Do you think that the future benefit (whatever that may be: it's vague enough now) is *worth the cost you are paying for it?*"

No reply. A look crossed Hoar's face that made me think he sometimes asked the same question of himself.

"It does appear to be a very *senseless* quarrel, Hoar," went on the Squire. Cole had walked on. "One-sided, too. There's an old saying, 'Cutting off one's nose to spite one's face,' and your strike seems just an illustration of it. You see it is only *you men* that suffer. The rulers you speak of don't; the masters, in one sense, don't, for they are not reduced to any extremity of any kind. But you, my poor fellows, *you* bear the brunt of it all. Look at your homes, how they are bared; look at your hungry children. What but hunger drove little Dick to crib that bun yesterday?"

Hoar took off his notched hat and passed his hand over his brow and his black hair. It seemed to be a favourite action of his when in any worry of thought.

"It is just ruin, Jacob Hoar. If some great shock—say an avalanche of snow, or a thunder-bolt—descended suddenly from the skies and destroyed everything there was in your home, leaving but the bare walls standing, what a dreadful calamity you would think it. How bitterly you'd bemoan it!—perhaps almost feel inclined, if you only dared, to reproach Heaven for its cruelty! But you—you bring on this calamity yourself, of your own free and deliberate will. You have dismantled your home with your own fingers; you've taken out your goods and sold or pledged them, to buy food. I hear you have parted with all."

"A'most," assented Hoar readily; as if it quite pleased him the Squire should show up the case at its worst.

"Put it that you resume work to-morrow, you don't resume it as a free man. You'll have a load of debt and embarrassment on your shoulders. You've got your household goods to redeem—if they are then still redeemable: you've got clothes and shoes to buy, to replace present rags: while on your mind will lie the weight of all this past time

### *Our Strike.*

of trouble, cropping up every half-hour like a nightmare. Now—is the future benefit you hint at worth all this?"

Hoar twitched a thorny spray off the hedge behind the pales, and twirled it about between his teeth.

"Any way," he said, the look of perplexity clearing somewhat on his face, "I be but doing as my fellows do; and we are a-doing for the best. So far as we are told and believe, it'll be all for the best."

"Then *do* it," returned the Squire in a passion: and went stamping away with his gun.

"Johnny, they are all pig-headed together," he presently said, as we crossed the stile into the field of stubble whence the corn had been reaped. "One can't help being sorry for them: they are blinded by specious arguments that'll turn out, I fear, all moonshine. Hold my gun, lad. Where's that dog, now? Here, Dash, Dash, Dash!"

Dash came running up; and Tod with him.

In a fortnight's time, Crabb Cot was deserted again. Tod and I returned to our studies, the Squire and the rest to Dyke Manor. As the weeks went on, scraps of news would reach us about the strike. There were meetings of the masters alone: meetings of the men and what they called delegates; meetings of masters and men combined. It all came to nothing. The masters at length offered to concede a little: the men (inwardly wearied out, sick to death of the untoward whole) would have accepted the slight concession and returned to work with willing feet; but their rulers—the delegates, or whatever they were—said no. And so the pinching distress continued: the men got more morose, and the children raggeder. After that (things remaining in a chronic state, I suppose) we heard nothing.

"Another lot of faggots, Thomas; and heap up the coal. This is weather, this is. Goodness, man! Don't put the coal on gingerly as if you were afraid of it. Molly's a fool."

We were in the cosy sitting-room again at Crabb Cot. The Squire was right: it *was* weather: the coldest I've ever felt in December. Old Thomas's hands were frozen with the outside drive from the station. Molly, who had come on the day before, had got about a pennyworth of fire in the grate to greet us with. Naturally it put the Squire's temper up.

"That there strike's a-going on still, sir," began Thomas, as he waited to watch his faggots blaze up.

"No!" cried the Squire. For we had supposed it at an end.

"It is, though, master. Ford the driver telled me, coming along, that Crabb Lane was in a fine state for distress."

"Oh, dear! I wish I knew whose fault it is!" bewailed Mrs. Todhetley. "What more did the driver say, Thomas?"

"Well, ma'am, *he* said it must be the men's fault—because there the work is, still a-waiting for 'em, and they won't do it."

"The condition the poor children must be in!"

"Like hungry wolves," said old Thomas. "'Twas what Ford called 'em, and he ought to know: own brother to Ford the baker, as lives in the very thick of the spot!"

Nothing, hardly, was talked of that evening but the strike. Its stretch of continuance half frightened some of us. Old Coney, coming in to smoke his pipe with the Squire, pulled a face as long as your arm over the poors-rate prospect: the Squire wondered how much work would stay in the country.

It was said the weekly allowance made to the men was not so much as it was at first. It was also said that the Society, making it, considered Crabb Lane in general had been particularly improvident in laying the allowance out, or it would not have been reduced to its present distressed condition. Which was not to be wondered at, in Mr. Coney's opinion: people used to very good wages, he said, could not all at once pull up habits and look at every farthing as a miser does. Crabb Lane was reproachfully assured by the Society that other strikes had kept themselves quite respectable, comparatively speaking, upon just the same allowance, and not parted with *all* their pots and pans.

That night I dreamt of the strike. It's as true as that I am writing this. I dreamt I saw thousands and thousands of red-faced men—not pale ones—each tossing a loaf of bread up and down.

"I suppose I may go over and see Eliza," I said to Mrs. Todhetley after breakfast in the morning.

"There's no reason why you may not, Johnny, that I know of," she answered, after a pause. "Except the cold."

As if I minded the cold! "I hope the whole lot, she and the young ones, won't look like skeletons, that's all. Tod, will you come?"

"Not if I know it, old fellow. I've no fancy for seeing skeletons."

"Oh that was all my nonsense."

"I know that. A pleasant journey to you."

The hoar frost had gathered on the trees, the ice hung in fantastic shapes from their branches: it was altogether a beautiful sight. Groups of Miss Timmens's girls, coming to school with frozen noses, were making slides as they ran. As to Crabb Lane, it looked nearly deserted, the cold kept the folks in-doors. Knocking at Hoar's door with a noise like a fire-engine, I went in with a leap.

The scene I came upon brought me up short. Just at first I did not understand it. In the self-same place where Dicky's bed had been that first day, was a bed now, and Eliza lay on it: and by her side, wedged against the wall, what looked to be a bundle of green baize with a calico nightcap on. The children—and really and truly they were not much better than live skeletons—sat on the floor.

"What's to do here, you little mites? Is mother ill?"

"Dicky, tending the fire (I could have put it in a cocoa-nut), turned round to answer me. He had got quite well again, arm and all.

"Mother's *very* ill," said he in a whisper. "That's the new baby."

"The new what?"

"The new baby," repeated Dick, pointing to the green bundle. "It's two days old."

An old tin slop-pail, turned upside down, stood in the corner. I sat down on it to revolve the news and take in the staggering aspect of things.

"What do you say, Dick? A baby—two days old?"

"Two days and a bit," returned Dick. "I'd show him to you but for fraid o' waking mother."

"He came here the night afore last, he did, while we was all asleep up stairs," interposed the younger of the little girls, Jessy. "Mr. Cole brought him in his pocket: father said so."

Poor pale, pinched faces, with never a smile on either one! Nothing takes the spirit out of children like semi-famine, long continued.

Stepping across, I looked down at Mrs. Hoar. Her eyes were half open as if she were in a state of stupor. I don't think she knew me: I'm not sure she even saw me. The face was dreadfully thin and hollow, and just as white as death.

"Wouldn't mother be better up-stairs, Dick?"

"She's here 'cause o' the fire," returned Dick, gently dropping-on a bit of coal the size of a marble. "There ain't no bed up there neither; they've brought it down."

The "bed" looked like a wide sack of shavings. From my heart I don't believe it was anything else. At that moment, the door opened and a woman came in; a neighbour, I suppose; her clothes very thin.

"It's Mrs. Watts," said Dick.

Mrs. Watts curtsied. She looked as starved as they did. It seemed she knew me.

"She be very bad, Mr. Ludlow, sir."

"She seems so. Is it—fever?"

"Law, sir! It's more famine nor fever. If her strength can last out—why, well and good; she may rally. If it don't, she'll go, sir."

"Ought she not to have things, Mrs. Watts? Beef-tea and wine, and that."

Mrs. Watts stared a minute, and then her lips parted with a sickly smile. "I don't know where she'd get 'em from, sir! Beef-tea and wine! A drop o' plain tea is a'most more nor us poor can manage to find now: the strike have lasted long, you see, sir. Anyway she's too weak to take much of anything."

"If I—if I could bring some beef-tea—or some wine—would it do her good?"

"It might just be the saving of her life, Mr. Ludlow, sir."

I went galloping home through the snow and the slides. Mrs. Todhetley was stoning raisins in the dining-room for the Christmas puddings. Telling her the news in a heap, I sat down to get my breath.

"Ah, I was afraid so," she said quietly, and without surprise. "I feared there might be another baby at the Hoars' by this time."

"Another baby at the Hoars'!" cried Tod, looking up from my new Shakespeare that he was skimming. "How is it going to get fed?"

"I fear that's a problem none of us can solve, Joseph," said she.

"Well, folks must be daft, to go on collecting a heap more mouths together when there's nothing to feed 'em on," concluded Tod, dropping his head into the book again. Mrs. Todhetley was slowly wiping her hands on the damp cloth, and looking doubtful.

"Joseph, your papa's not in the way and I can't speak to him—do you think I might venture to send something to poor Eliza, under the circumstances?"

"Send, and risk it," said Tod, in his prompt manner. "*Of course*. As to the Pater—at the worst, he'll only storm a bit. But I fancy he'd be the first to send help himself. He'd not let her die for the want of it."

"Then I'll despatch Hannah at once."

Hoar was down by the bed when Hannah got there, holding a sup of ale to his wife's lips. Mr. Cole was standing by with his hat on.

"*Ale!*" exclaimed Hannah to the surgeon. "May she take *that*?"

"Bless me, yes," said he, "and do her good."

Hannah followed him outside the door, for he was leaving. "How will it go with her, sir?" she asked. "She looks dreadful ill."

"Well," returned the doctor, "I think the night will about see the end."

The words took Hannah in a heap. "Oh, my goodness!" she cried. "What's the matter with her that she should die?"

"Famine and worry have been the matter with her. What she will die of is exhaustion. She has had a sharpish pull just now, you understand; and has no stamina to bring her up again."

It was late in the afternoon when Hannah came back home. There was no change, she said, for the better or the worse. Eliza still lay as much like one dead as alive.

"It's quite a picter to see the poor little creatures sitting on the bare floor and quiet as mice, never speaking but in a whisper," cried Hannah, as she shook the snow off her petticoats on the mat. "It's just as if they had an instinct of what's coming."

The Squire, far from being angry, wanted to send over half the house. It was not Eliza's fault, he said, it was the strike's—and he hoped with all his heart she'd get through it. In the evening, between dinner and tea, I offered to go over and see whether there was any progress. Being curious on the point themselves, they said yes.

The snow was coming down smartly. My great coat and hat were soon white enough to be taken for a marching ghost. Knocking at the door gently, it was opened by Jacky. He asked me to go in.

To my surprise they were again all alone—Eliza and the children. Mrs. Watts had gone home to put her own flock to bed; and Hoar was out. Liza sat on the hearthstone, the sleeping bundle on her lap.

"Father's a-went to fetch Mr. Cole," said Jacky. "Mother began a talking queer—dreams, like—and it frightened him. He told us to mind her till he run back with the doctor."

Looking down, I thought she was delirious. Her eyes were wide open and shining: a scarlet spot was on her cheeks. She began talking to me: or rather to the air; for I'm sure she knew no one.

"A great bright place, it is, up there; all alight with shining. Silvery, like the stars. Oh it's beautiful! The people be in white, and no strikes can come in!"

"She've been a-talking about the strikes all along," whispered Jacky, who was kneeling on the mattress. "Mother! Mother, would ye like a drop o' the wine?"

Whether the word mother aroused her, or the boy's voice—and she had always loved Jacky with a great love—she seemed to recognize him. He raised her head as handy as could be, and held the tea-cup to her lips. It was half full of wine, and she drank it all by slow degrees.

"Master Johnny!" she said then in a faint tone.

I couldn't help the tears filling my eyes as I knelt down by her in Jacky's place. She knew she was going. I tried to say a word or two.

"It's the leaving the childern, Master Johnny, to strikes and things o' that kind, that's making it so hard to me to die. The world's full o' trouble: look at what ours has been since the strike set in. I'd not so much mind *that* for them, though, for the world here don't last over long, and perhaps it's a'most as good be miserable as easy in it—if I thought they'd all come to me in the bright place after. But—when one's clammed with famine and what not, it's a sore temptation to do wrong. Lord, bring them to me!" she broke forth, suddenly clasping her hands. "Lord Jesus, pray for them, and save them!"

She was nothing but skin and bone. Her hands fell, and she began plucking at the outside blanket. You might just have heard a pin drop in the room. The frightened children hardly breathed.

"I shall see your dear mamma, Master Johnny. I was at her death-bed; 'twas me mostly waited on her in her sickness. If ever a sainted lady went straight to heaven, 'twas her. When I stood over her grave I little thought my own ending was to be so soon. Strikes! Nothing but strikes—and famine, and bad tempers, and blows. Lord Jesus, wash us white from our sins, and take us all to that better world! No strikes there; no strikes there."



She was going off her head again. The door opened, and Hoar, the doctor, and Mrs. Watts all came in together.

Mrs. Todhetley went over through the snow in the morning. Eliza Hoar had died in the night, and lay on the mattress, her shrunken face calm and peaceful. Hoar and the children had migrated to the kitchen at the back, a draughty place hardly large enough for the lot to turn round in. The eldest girl was trying to feed the baby with a teaspoon.

"What are you giving it, Liza?" asked Mrs. Todhetley.

"Sugar and water with a sup o' milk in't, please, ma'am."

"I hope you are contented, Jacob Hoar, now you've killed your wife."

Very harsh words, those, for Mrs. Todhetley to speak: and she hastened to soften them. But, as she said afterwards, the matter altogether was a cruel folly and sin, making her heart burn with shame. "That is, Hoar, the strike has killed her."

Hoar, who had been sitting with his head up the chimney, noticing nobody, burst into a sudden flood of tears. Mrs. Todhetley was giving the children a biscuit a-piece from her bag.

"I did it all for the best," said Hoar, presently. "'Twasn't me that originated the strike. I but joined it with all the others."

"And their wives and families are in no better plight than yours."

"Nobody can say I've not done my duty as a husband and a father," cried Hoar. "I've not been a drunkard, nor a rioter, nor a spend-thrift. I've never beat her nor swore at her, as some of 'em does."

"Well, she is lying *there*: and the strike has brought her to it. Is it so, or not?"

Hoar did not answer: only caught up his breath with a noise of pain.

"It seems to me, Hoar, that the strikes cannot be the good things you think for," she said, her voice now full of pity for the man. "They don't bring luck with them; on the contrary, they bring a vast deal of ill-luck. It's you workmen that suffer; mostly in your wives and children. I don't pretend to judge whether strikes may be good in a political point of view; I am not clever; but they do tell very hard upon your poor patient wives and little ones."

"And don't you see as they tell upon us men too!" he retorted with a bursting sob, half pitiful, half savage. "Ay, and worst of all: for if they should be mistaken steps 'stead of right ones, we've got 'em on our conscience."

"But you go in for them, Hoar. You, individually: and this last night's blow is the result. It certainly seems that there's a mistake somewhere."

This has not been much to tell of, but it's *true*: and, as strikes are all

the go just now, I thought I would write out for you a corner scrap of ours. For my own part, I cannot see that strikes do much good in the long run ; or, at the best, that they are worth the cost. I do know, for I have heard and seen it, that through many a long day the poor wives and children can only cry aloud to Heaven to have pity on them.

As to Hoar and his family, if you wish to know the upshot, they g along better by and by. For the strike (it was the longest on record in our parts, though we have had a few since) came to an end at last. It ended, that one, *by the tired-out men giving in*. So they began life again with bare homes, and sickly young ones ; and some emptied chairs.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.



#### FAITHLESS.

(Horace—Epodes, 15. *Free Translation*.)

'Twas night. The moon shone placidly  
In the blue depths serene ;  
And glitt'ring in their jewelled robes,  
The stars moved near their queen.

More closely than wild ivy clings  
The lofty oak around,  
Your pliant arms in fond embrace  
About my neck you wound.

Vowing to love me ever—  
That whilst the wolf should be  
A foe to the white fleecy flock,  
You would be true to me :

Long as Orion frowningly  
Should vex the wintry sea—  
The terror of the sailor crew—  
You would be true to me :

Till the soft air should cease to fan—  
Crossing the open lea—  
Apollo's floating yellow locks,  
You would be true to me.

False heart ! that seemed so warm and sure  
Throbbing against my own,  
Stealing away my life's best life,  
To leave me quite alone.

To leave me for another,  
To cast your truth aside,  
To yield to him the loveliness  
That once was all my pride.

*Once*, but no more, Neæra !  
Your love was never mine ;  
And scornfully I now withdraw  
The faith then wholly thine.

In passionate disdain I'll seek  
Some meek and tender dove,  
Who, fairer, or less fair than thou,  
Shall give me love for love.

And though thy fickle fancy turn  
To shine once more on me,  
And tears should brim thy pleading eyes,  
I will not bend to thee.

Never again ! unmoved I'll meet  
Thy beauty's treach'rous lure ;  
Dead to the arts which erst enslaved,  
I'll laugh at them, secure.

But as for you, whoe'er you are,  
That, where I lose, have won ;  
Who smile contempt at my defeat—  
Yourself the favoured one—

Though you be rich in flocks and herds,  
And wealth of fruitful lands ;  
Though all Pactolus flow for you  
Over its golden sands ;

Though the most wondrous mysteries  
Pythagoras can show,  
Escape you not ; and you excel  
Bright Nireus in the glow

Of beauty's magic radiance—  
Alas ! e'en whilst you press  
Faint lips against the lips which meet  
Yours in a false caress,

You shall bewail her perfidy—  
Her love transferr'd elsewhere ;  
Whilst I, in my turn triumphing,  
Shall mock at your despair.

EMMA RHODES.

## GOING TO CHURCH IN THE HIGHLANDS.

THE weather was purely Scotch; thoroughly, gloriously Scotch. Clear and brilliant, with a wealth of sunshine and sweet air; and in the mornings, while we yet revelled in the fresh beauty, there would come, unnoticed till it was there, a mist-cloud gathering to its rest upon the mountain tops.

Down it would creep; down the granite cliffs, and softly fill up the glens, until all was covered in grey mist. This was the point at which despair would set in; and collecting our letter-writing materials, we would give an anxious glance at the particularly small stock of unread literature yet remaining. One morning, John suddenly rang the bell.

"John, what are you pulling that bell for?"

"I don't know. To get the fire lighted, or something."

"But, John, it is most ridiculous of you. Fancy having a fire in August!"

"Never mind. I am sure it is awfully cold. At any rate it will be something to look at."

To a certain extent this was true: the world outside our bit of a window was one hopeless cloud. So John called in the big stout lassie who attended upon our wants, and for his morning's employment set himself to watch her manner of making up a fire, and to wonder at the singular awkwardness of her movements in so doing.

In the meantime I continued the letter which was to carry down to our friends in England a glowing description of our adventures in Scotland, coupled with many an enthusiastic encomium of the splendid weather. By the time I had arrived so far in my letter, I was disturbed by indignant expostulation between John and the big lassie.

"I tell ye there's a beekie oot bye!"

"A beekie? What on earth do you mean by a beekie?"\*

"Hets!—just a beekie," and with an alarming slam of the door the nymph vanished. John pushed his chair back from the newly kindled fire, which was shooting forth a shower of sparks, and turning to the window, uttered a sudden exclamation which frightened me into the belief that one of the meteors from the grate had set him alight. But it was only a change in the weather.

The grey mist had lifted, and a magnificently vivid rainbow arched the heavens, and all was blue sky, blue sea, blue mountains, purple heather and dark forest trees.

I think one great source of our enjoyment was the complete change and newness of everything, and the quaint, pleasant Scottish dialect. We made several new friends, who one and all received and welcomed us in such a hearty, hospitable way that we could not feel grateful

\* A box of coals.

enough to them. Our especial friend amongst friends was the young minister, whose earnest, simple, and yet almost boyish nature endeared him to all who came in contact with him. He was the playfellow of all the children in the village; and whilst they were devoted to him, their fathers and mothers felt he was their true friend, to be loved; and by the oldest men and women in that village on the hill side he was looked up to and respected.

John and I used to go and hear him preach in the primitive church on the sea shore, and no churchgoing had ever been so much to my mind as was this. The last Sunday of our stay in the Highlands was a wild autumn day; stormy gusts of wind and driving rain came battling past the fir trees and tearing through the glens. It was too bad to walk; that point was beyond dispute; and yet we had the greatest desire to hear Archie preach for the last time; the same Archie who had been the life and fun of our expedition up the glen the day before.

"Couldn't we go to church in a car, John?" said I.

"Car," returned John, with some indignation; "haven't you found out yet that they wouldn't let a car out for hire on the Sabbath in this village."

"But it might make some difference if they knew that we wanted it for church, and could not go without it."

John thought it useless to make the attempt, but I was so really anxious to go that I went and asked the people of the house whether they would let us have their car for this one occasion for the purpose of attending church; that without it we must stay at home, the day being too wild for us to attempt the walk.

There was a long consultation amongst the whole family as to whether the car could be had out on the Sabbath day even for such a purpose, each member of the household giving his or her ungarnished opinion. Even the youngest son, a red haired youth of ten, who had never before given an opinion on any subject but that of porridge, distinctly said that the "de'l was puttin't in our heads."

The opinion of this youth seemed to bear some weight in the family, and I was afraid our chance of the car was gone for that day, at any rate; but the household was a household of women, and they hesitated.

We got our car.

John and I packed ourselves, covered with macintosh, into the particularly small box on wheels, without too much incumbrance in the way of springs, which was dignified by the title of "the car," and were driven over the hills to the church, which was about three miles off.

On the way, and during a very hard shower, we passed the red haired youth and his sisters, the big stout lassie among them, walking

along, all wrapped in home-spun plaids, which were enormously thick and weather proof, very long, and wound several times round the form. The size, therefore, to which the big stout lassie attained was considerable.

All along the road over the hill we passed the cottage people, dressed in their best, with their plaids about them, all bound for church, quite undeterred by any amount of "coorse wather;" with this remark they would give us a friendly nod and a smile as we passed. Some few, indeed, were evidently making remarks upon the subject of the car.

It was one of those days which are infinitely more becoming to bonnie Scotland than the unruffled peaceful calm of the garb she sometimes wears. The grand masses of clouds moving with the greatest speed across the sky, the whole landscape purple and black, and every now and then glorious gleams of sunlight on little bits of trees, heather, or white waterfalls; the sunlight passing so rapidly that almost before you could note it it had passed onward.

The wind was whirling and eddying down the hill-side with such violence that we could barely catch one another's words as we drove down to the sea shore. The church was in a dilapidated condition, and from outside presented more the appearance of a barn than anything else. It stood on the shore, with but the road intervening between it and the sands; and the waves were tossing the white foam almost on to the road. As we descended from our car the effect among the hills we had just left was splendid, and has left a never-fading picture in my memory.

The colour of the foreground was almost black, so intense were the dark purples, greys, and greens. Down the ridge of one hill-side was a line of still darker fir trees, and the glen immediately behind it was one flood of brilliant sunshine. Through the light the rain was pouring, every drop glistening like countless silver. Across the hill-side and down into the sea was an intensely vivid rainbow, while on the water was the white sail of a ship sailing through the rainbow.

I tried to open the old tumble-down door of the church. The latch was easily lifted, but the woodwork stuck firmly, and after an ineffectual effort or two, I gave my place to John, who using some force got it to open. There was a perfect stillness in the church, although it was full of people; the door we had come in by faced the congregation, and we passed through them to a seat: the seats were not let, although each family went to their own place. The pews were most curiously arranged, and you found yourself sitting back to some people, sideways to others, and facing the rest. There was scarcely room to get into the pews, and the bare planks which formed the seats were so narrow that you continually felt as though you were slipping off; the pew, too, was so full that I was covered with little bits of the white-



wash, which kept peeling off the wall next to which I sat : our feet were on bare earth and stones.

There were a great many very young children in the church, and they all behaved remarkably well. In the pew behind ours there was a wee wee thing in a huge green satin bonnet, tied round the sweetest little serious face possible. She had had a halfpenny given to her to put in the bag by and bye, and this was grasped in the little hot hand, and let fall on to the stones every few minutes. How such an atom had ever been safely brought through the gale to church without being blown away, was a deep mystery.

There was a general scent of peppermint pervading the air, for all through Scotland I find it is the custom to take peppermint drops to church with you to suck during the service. The congregation was a most interesting one to observe. Shepherds, farmers, sailors, and working men ; bonnie, healthy lassies, important looking wives, and old women in their long, full black cloaks and white mutch with the black band round their heads ; as earnest, true believing, and simple minded a congregation as could well be brought together ; and yet one and all having their own especial views and theories, which they were quite ready to discuss either with the minister himself or any one else.

Whilst we were watching the faces of those near us, the door by which we had entered seemed to burst open with a more than usual gust of wind, and the young minister came in bareheaded through the rain, from the school-house close by, where he had been putting on his black silk pulpit dress ; the big drops covered his head and shoulders as he entered and walked up the stone steps into the little pulpit. Of course there was no organ, and the singing was led by a precentor with a tolerably good voice, compared with many I had heard in Scotch churches.

We had a splendid sermon, which was quite worth the battle about the car. Every one was very still, and the little child in the green bonnet fell asleep and dropped her halfpenny on to the gravel, and by and bye woke up with a snore and a gurgle occasioned by her having gone off to sleep with a peppermint drop in her mouth. Twice I had peppermint offered to me ; once by an old farmer, who stretched across John for the purpose, and once by a stout old woman in the pew before us. Though much disliking the flavour of the sweetmeat, I each time felt as if it would be refusing the calumet not to accept, and silently watched my opportunity of making away with the drops amongst the gravel at our feet.

There was something about the church—its very poverty, the earnest, simple congregation, and the way the minister came in through the rain, bareheaded—that was inexpressibly simple, touching, and true ; a few times in a long life will churchgoing have that rare impressiveness with one.

At the close of the paraphrase, little velvet bags fastened to long

poles were passed down the pews for the collection, and when done with, were rested against the wall beside the pulpit ; and the minister stretching out both arms, the congregation rose for the blessing. The service was at an end after that, and we passed out of the old worn door-way and on to the shore, giving one last look at the lone church, this primitive church, whose only communion service was a single pewter plate and mug, and whose sacrament was administered but once a year, out on the open hill-side, all among the heather, at the back of the building. We persuaded the minister to take a seat in our car and drive up the hill to dinner with us, as it was our last Sunday in the Highlands.

We stopped outside the house to admire the double rainbow, and we talked about the church on the sea shore till the big stout lassie called us to the simple meal.

I suppose it is by the force of contrast, but sometimes when I am sitting in one of the city churches, the thought comes over me of a barn-like building, a church amongst the mountains, a simple congregation, an earnest preacher ; and all that is connected with our last "Going to Church in the Highlands."



## THE MUTINY OF THE "KILBLAIN."

## I.

IT was Christmas Day. Not such a one as the term is apt to suggest to people who have never been out of England. Nothing like the last we had in this country, for instance, with its accompaniments of frost and snow, and biting cold. But Christmas day as at midsummer. Not a breath of wind was stirring. The sky was without a cloud, and its blue looked quite pale—almost grey; for the air was so rarefied that the vault of Heaven seemed to have receded a long, long way. And the sun's rays poured down with an intensity which, one might have fancied, nothing in the tropics could exceed. Nevertheless, there was in the air a certain elasticity which would generally have been missed in those regions. The idea of such weather on Christmas day is difficult to realize to those who have never seen it. Even they who experience it can scarcely persuade themselves, at first, that it is really the chiefest and best of our festivals—the one they have always, in the old country, thought so much of and enjoyed so thoroughly; that joyous season which ever left some pleasant episode to look back to, some tender recollection to cherish. It is only after the lapse of years that exiles get accustomed to the transformation.

Our narrative opens at one of the most charming of our antipodean seaports. The time—well, some years ago.

Seated in the verandah of their house, which commanded a good view of the harbour, was a worthy couple—David and Mrs. Taylor. He was a hale, hearty man, a merchant-commander: though turned fifty years of age, he looked considerably younger. She, some few years less, but carrying her age well also. When young, she had been very handsome, and still retained a certain portion of her good looks. But the chief thing in her which struck a close observer was the settled look of sadness that lay on her features. With one exception her life had been tolerably free from care; but, that one—it had turned her hair grey before its time.

Mrs. Taylor had one child: a son; born about two years after her marriage, when she lived in England and her husband was at sea, chief officer of his ship. Never, as the child grew, was mother more fond than she: the boy was the great treasure of her life; her joy, her solace. For a few years he was, so to say, her only companion, for her husband was almost always away on his long voyages. But, fond though she was of the lad, she did not spoil him. If ever woman in this world strove earnestly to train her child for good, it was she. She was plain and homely in her ideas, and had had but a moderate education; but one thing she did possess—far above all social and other earthly ad-

vantages : she had taken God for her guide, and ever sought to live near to Him. And it was in humble dependence upon Him that she tried to mould her child. Her efforts seemed not in vain. The boy was naturally quick and clever—tractable, too, and open as the day.

When eight years old, he was put to a good, sound boarding school; where he remained till he was nearly fourteen. Of regular holidays he had none. His father had long since risen to command, and when young William was placed at school his mother accompanied her husband on his voyages. Whenever they were in England, however, the lad passed most of the time with them. His chief delight at these seasons was to go on board his father's ship and clamber about the rigging, or dive into all sorts of dark and dusty places below decks.

Captain Taylor prospered well. After a few years of command he had saved sufficient money to purchase—with the help of a small legacy falling to his wife at the time—a vessel of his own. She was a smart little bark of about three hundred tons; and he proceeded to put in practice the idea of many past years. He chartered the "Margaret"—so named in honour of his wife—for one of our Australian colonies; and, embarking all his belongings, set sail, determined to make a home in the new country.

During the voyage, William's taste for the sea fully developed itself. When the "Margaret" arrived out, and entered into the coasting trade, for which her master had destined her, he was regularly taken on as one of the crew.

He was a smart, willing boy, and got on. But his father knew from experience that to command well one "must go through the mill," must first learn to obey; and he felt that, being with him, his son was not in a strict school. The captain thought about this a good deal.

Matters had gone on for some time, when an old chum of Captain Taylor arrived with his ship from England. She was a regular trader to the colony. Here David Taylor saw his chance. His son William was bound apprentice, for three years, to Captain Stewart, her commander.

For a time all went well. The young fellow made two trips to England and back, and started on the third. At his return this third time he was to rejoin his father. It would be a fine opening for him.

The ship reached London in due course, and was nearly ready to sail again, when William Taylor, together with another apprentice, disappeared. Captain Stewart caused all possible inquiries to be made after them; but to no purpose. Some days later he received a letter, stating that the two lads had sailed in a ship bound for the East Indies and China, which places they had always longed to visit. The letter gave no date, neither names nor address, and afforded not the slightest clue by which the runaways could be traced. Indeed it stated that they had changed their names, to avoid detection and pursuit. Nothing remained for Captain Stewart to do but to despatch

by mail this unpleasant news to his old friends in Australia. Rarely had a more vexatious task been allotted him: he thought they might blame *him*.

But now, Captain Taylor did not attach very much importance to it. He was sorry that the lad had deserted; but he fully anticipated that a year or two would see him home again—quite willing to settle down. In the meantime he concluded they would hear from him.

With the mother it was very different. When the news was imparted to her, she seemed to feel a strange presentiment that she should never see her boy again. And the feeling never left her. For a long time she was utterly inconsolable. Half her days and nights were passed in tears. She refused to eat; and, in short, ended by so reducing her system, that a bad cold and influenza she caught nearly sent her to her grave.

Gradually she got calmer, and, in some measure, reconciled to William's absence. Time is a great reconciler. She began to take heart from her husband's argument that, after all, it was only a boy's trick; that he, too, had, at the same age, experienced—and given way to—the same longing to visit many countries; that, after a while, William would turn up all right, and none the worse for having roughed it, and acquired a little extra experience.

But, when two years were past, and never a letter had been received from him, then both felt that there was little hope left. Captain Taylor did not acknowledge it in so many words; but his misgivings were perhaps as great as his wife's.

And so the years went on. It was now hard upon seven since their boy last parted from them. They had, in a measure, become inured to the loss. The shock had passed long since. But both, although in a different degree, would ever feel the void—aye, and feel it acutely.

Captain Taylor had been most fortunate in business during these years. Everything he touched turned, as it were, into gold. He owned several vessels, and was quite a leading man in his adopted country. Nevertheless, when at rest from work in an evening, a strange yearning would come over him, and he felt that he would willingly give up all his gains, and begin life again as a plain skipper, if he might only have his boy with him. Oh, how bitterly he repented having sent him away, from an idea of getting him properly disciplined! Could not he—he asked himself now—have enforced obedience in all things? And why send him away? He might have foreseen how it would end—a smart, impulsive youth, left to the influence of reckless, spendthrift sailors. And the tears would start from his eyes, and he would long for the morrow to dawn, that he might forget it all in the hurry and turmoil of business.

But with the mother it was far otherwise. She had no business in which to seek oblivion. She had not the thousand-and-one distrac-

tions of a man engaged in an extensive trade. Thrown upon herself, she ever nursed her grief in private. For her husband's and the world's sake she appeared cheerful; at times, even gay; but the weight never left her heart. She felt one constant, intense longing for the child she had loved far more than self, and could never (as she believed) meet again on earth. And what of the next world? Ah, there lay one of the chief stings in her grief! She knew what young men, in the heyday of youth, and led by the example of those older than themselves, are. And she ever asked herself, "How had he died?" Had he fallen a prey to one of the many sicknesses which decimate crews in the pestilential climates of the East, but which, nevertheless, do, most of them, afford a brief period for reflection and repentance ere they hurry away their victims? Or had his been the sudden death? She had, once or twice in her voyages, heard the startling cry, "Man overboard!" and watched the boat return to the ship's side with a life-buoy; but, alas, with no cold, and dripping, and rescued seaman. And when she recalled these episodes, and pictured to herself *her* boy so perishing, she would cry aloud in her bitter anguish. And so it ever was with her. She strove to feel resigned, but she could never put her great grief wholly away.

And now to go back to the beginning. It was Christmas Day, and some three hours past noon. Captain Taylor and his wife were, as I have said, seated in the verandah. They had partaken of Christmas fare at dinner as a matter of custom; but the appetite was marred by the thought of the one, wanting. David Taylor smoked his pipe in silence. *She* was lost in memories of the past.

"By George, old woman, there's the mail coming in!"

The captain had started to his feet with the exclamation, and laid down the pipe. Sure enough, the intercolonial steamer was rounding the point, bringing the outpost's budget. Mrs. Taylor came out of her reverie and gazed abroad with some interest.

"I'll go down and see what news she brings," cried the captain. And, taking his white-covered straw hat and white umbrella, he departed for the beach.

She sat on, listless, watching the steamer get in to her berth. The anchor was let go, the steam blown off, and the busy movement of shore boats went on. Mrs. Taylor drifted back to the old thoughts. She was living over again that Christmas Day, now seven years past, when her boy had dined with them and in company with his new master—Captain Stewart.

Seated there, alone, on that Christmas Day—that day which, above all others, speaks to us so eloquently of God's love to man—she could not keep back the thought—*what* had she done to merit so hard a measure, so terrible an affliction? But the next moment she had got the better of it, and a silent prayer of repentance went up to Heaven.



She rose to go indoors for a book, and returned with it to the verandah. How long she had sat reading she knew not, when she was disturbed by her husband's approaching footsteps. Looking down at him as he crossed the road towards her, she was suddenly struck with the expression of his countenance. There seemed to be an agitation in it that he vainly tried to repress. Instantly a feeling of suspense, of fear almost, dead for some years now, stirred her own heart, and she rose and met him indoors. For a moment they looked at each other in silence.

"The mail is distributed, and I have a letter for you, Margery," said the captain at length. "One from London. It was addressed to you; but I opened it."

"Yes," she faintly said, in the terrible suspense.

"There's very particular news in it—as I suspected when I saw the handwriting. Now don't you get excited; or——"

"Oh David! Let me know at once!"

"Well, I will. I wish you'd not tremble so"—and he was trembling himself. "It is good news, wife."

"It is about William," she gasped, from her pale and parted lips. "Is he alive yet—is he well?"

"Yes, thank God, he is both alive and well. There"—holding out the back of the letter to her—"do you know that writing?"

Her lips trembled, her eyes had almost a greedy look. Know it! "It is William's," she cried, with the trembling joy of a little child.

"Yes, it is his, the audacious rascal—and never a word of apology in it for the trick he has played us!" returned Captain Taylor in mock anger, while his eyes were blinded with tears.

Oh, if these careless sons did but know the pain they cost—the love they cannot quench! Would they go their own way as they do to work ill?

It was but a short letter:—

"London, November 2nd, 18—.

"Dear Mother,—I have at last got a ship for the colonies. Her name is the 'Kilblain.' She is bound for Auckland. That is the best I could do, but I can soon get from thence to you. I have shipped at a shilling a month, to be discharged out there. I expect to be home in February. I cannot tell how much I long to be with you and my father again. I hope you are both quite well, as I am at present. With best love, I remain, ever,

"Your affectionate Son,  
WILLIAM TAYLOR."

Her husband sat apart, watching her critically. She folded the letter in silence, and passed into the next apartment—their bed-room—and shut herself in alone. We may imagine a little of what passed there.

The change wrought in Captain and Mrs. Taylor by these tidings was

marvellous. It was as though they had grown young again. The great weight of care was cast away, and their hearts bounded as with the light-heartedness of youth. And they had so short a time to wait now ere their boy would be restored to them. Only till February; and Christmas was already past. Nevertheless, it seemed like an age to the mother. Before the following day was ended Captain Taylor had told half the town that William, the long-lost, was on his way home.

And what had Master William Taylor been doing with himself all that time? A summary of it may be given at once to the reader, though Captain Taylor did not hear it until later.

He had long ago, as the letter to Captain Stewart stated, sailed for India. There, not liking his ship, he left her, and engaged himself on board an opium clipper—smuggler would be the correct term. After a time he was discharged in China, and joined a vessel trading on the coast. A few months later she sailed for England, and he went in her, determined to make his way home.

On arriving in London he found himself in possession of a considerable sum of ready money. Careless as a child, he spent it right and left in folly with his late shipmates, to one of whom he had taken a violent fancy. When their money was all gone these two agreed to ship again in a vessel going to California.

They arrived at San Francisco, left the ship, and made their way up the country. First they tried the mines. Not having any luck there, they returned to San Francisco, and went on to the Red Woods. There they obtained work, now on one ranch, now on another. Occasionally they got a job in the woods at cutting down timber. Getting tired of this, they went back again to San Francisco, and shipped for China. Here the two friends parted company. From that time William Taylor roved about until, at length, he found himself once more in London. He was sobered a little now; tired, in fact, of going so continually to the bad; and began to think, ungrateful fellow, that by way of change he would go home to Australia. Good times were sure to await him there. So he once more shipped before the mast in a vessel bound for Auckland, called the "Kilblain."

In the meantime his parents restrained their impatience as best they could. Captain Taylor calculated the probable time of the ship's arrival, and decided upon going to Auckland to await her, and to meet his son. Which he did towards the end of January.

## II.

THE "Kilblain" was a fine ship of eight hundred tons register. Her crew consisted of captain, first and second mates, carpenter, steward, cook, three boys, and fourteen able seamen; William Taylor counting amidst the latter. She was flush-decked, having neither poop nor top-gallant forecastle. The crew's place for sleeping, &c., was, therefore,

below. It was separated from the hold by a bulkhead of inch and half deals, put up roughly.

About the time of the ship's sailing, cargo was scarce; and when the date fixed for her departure arrived there was a considerable space left in the fore hold. This the owners filled up with casks of bottled beer, which they sent out on speculation, rather than let the ship go away not full and out of trim. The beer was stowed against the bulkhead of the fore-castle.

It was early in November when the *Kilblain* sailed. She had on board a general cargo, and a few passengers—all women. The captain was a young man—in command for the first time. The first mate was an excellent seaman, but in disposition easy-going and good-natured. The second was a decent young fellow, son of highly respectable parents, well-educated. But he had no experience: and to have that is of more importance than education on board ship. It was his first voyage as second mate. The foremast hands, on the contrary, were all men of more or less experience, smart fellows, good seamen—men who, under strict and efficient discipline, would have turned out as good a lot as ever sailed together.

For the first few weeks after leaving England matters went smoothly on board. The ship had got nearly across the south-east trades, when one evening the captain and first mate were pacing the deck together.

"How do the men get on, Mr. Mathers?" said the captain, addressing him.

"Capitally, sir," was the mate's reply. "I never sailed with a better lot."

"Yes, they seem to have got through a tidy bit of work. The ship was sent to sea in a shocking state; but she looks in very good order now."

"Indeed, it's wonderful what they have done. They are, every man—Jack of them, capital hands at the marlinspike; and as for making or shortening sail, they pull like horses."

"Ah! we were very fortunate to get such a crew," continued the captain, who had been privately anxious about this, his first voyage in command. And passing to the companion-door, he called out an order: "Steward, give the men a glass of grog."

Presently the steward went forward, with a couple of bottles and a wine-glass, to where the men were assembled round about the fore-mast. One of them had a concertina, which he played really well. So every fine evening, after the ordinary work of the day was done, the men got together and sang songs and danced hornpipes, and the mates and passengers would go forward to see the fun. Altogether things looked as pleasant, and the men seemed as contented, as possible.

Gradually, however, this changed. One or two of the men took to "growling;" they worked unwillingly, and gave "back-answers" to

the mates. These could not understand the change; they had, as they said at the time and after, always treated the fellows more like brothers than as men under their authority.

In a short time all the men were equally bad. When called to relieve the watch or shorten sail, they took a long time to come on deck. The wheel would not be relieved, sometimes, for half or three-quarters of an hour. If the officers found fault, in their mild way, they were put off with paltry excuses, and at the same time plainly sneered at; in short, it seemed that they were very little considered. They had treated the men so well and kindly, so *considerately*, and had made free with them to such an extent (a line of conduct unfortunately pursued but too frequently), that they did not know how to recover their lost ground. And this applied especially to the second mate. These young and, in spite of their having passed the board, generally inexperienced and more or less incompetent officers, are very frequently half afraid of the men. This arises from the consciousness that these can detect their incompetency, and see through the uncertainty which they feel, on most occasions, as to whether they are acting in a seamanlike manner when boxhauling the yards about, making or taking in sail, and especially in giving them their different jobs at rigging work. Consequently the young men do not like to appear too strict, for fear the sailors should turn on and covertly ridicule them.

Matters got from bad to worse, and many a treasonable word was spoken openly amid the men. At last, they were so long coming out when called, and worked so badly when they did come, that the captain himself interfered, and talked to them. They took little notice of this: worse than little; for they simply grinned in his face ironically. After that, whenever they had a long pull on a rope, songs were roared out in which they introduced words of ridicule, which might be taken as applicable to the captain and the officers: worse still, they added ribaldry for the special benefit of the women. Some things the officers overheard the men discussing, and which they reported to the captain, rather frightened him. He loaded his revolver, and carried it about in his pocket wherever he went. And thus affairs went on for a week or two longer.

All this time there was one thing about the crew which the officers could not understand. Some of them often seemed half drunk—not so bad as to be stupid or incapable of working properly, but just sufficiently so to be cheeky and reckless. The steward was questioned; but he declared he had never given any drink except when ordered to do so by the captain. The passengers all affirmed *they* had not once given a single drop since the day of "crossing the line," when they had each given a bottle of grog in payment of Neptune's fee, and to be set off the delights of initiation into his mysteries. It was most unacceptable. The hatches were carefully examined; but they had never been touched, and were fast battened down.

About three weeks before the ship reached Auckland the crisis came. One day the mate went forward to call the watch on deck after dinner. Nobody moved to obey. "Now, men, come; don't let us have any nonsense," said he, trying what a little bluster would do. "If you don't come out pretty quickly, I'll see if I can't make you."

"Will you?" came back the voice of one of them with an oath. "You had better try it on."

The mate looked down the companion-way leading into the fore-castle, and saw what he did not feel disposed to encounter. Seated on a chest, one at each side of the ladder, were two men, each with a bottle in his hand, ready to "let the mate have it" as soon as he should go down amongst them.

He went aft to report the state of affairs to the captain; and they held a council on the quarter-deck. The second mate, carpenter, and steward were invited to assist at it—the cook also.

There were six men and three boys aft; and thirteen big, able-bodied half-drunken devils forward. Perhaps the worst among them was William Taylor. In his sober senses he would have been ever well-conducted on board ship, obedient and respectful to his superior officers. Unfortunately, the pernicious example and teaching of his associates had made him as bad as themselves *when in drink*.

What was to be done? How were they to be got up out of the fore-castle? The council looked up at their young captain, and he at them. The question was speedily solved by the men themselves. They came on deck, some of them being armed with iron belaying-pins, and commenced their march aft in a body, cursing and shouting as they went. One was seen to step out a pace or two in front of the rest, evidently constituting himself the leader. *It was William Taylor*. Of superior education to the rest, they made him their spokesman.

Onward they marched, the captain standing out a step from his officers to confront them. Mr. William Taylor, his voice unsteady, his eyes inflamed, commenced his harangue on behalf of himself and friends. They had determined to pitch the officers overboard, he said, and kill the captain and his other aides: and all this was expressed in the most dreadful language. The men were all more or less drunk, and ripe for anything. The unfortunate women were huddled in a group together, shivering in mortal fear.

It was a critical moment: never a one so critical yet in the young captain's life. On pressed the mutineers; William Taylor, mad as a March hare with the drink he had taken, still the fore-leader. A volley of oaths on his lips, he rushed at the captain, and aimed at him a blow with the bludgeon he carried.

How it happened was never exactly known. Hardly *what* happened. In pulling the revolver from his pocket—perhaps the captain's hand trembled—only to point it and frighten them, it went off. It went off,

and William Taylor was shot dead. The shot struck through the heart: and he fell without a sign.

Had they been sober and sensible this might not have scattered the rest with a panic; being what they were, it did so, and they fell away, utter, shrinking cowards. Without any trouble they allowed themselves to be put in irons, some in one place, some in another.

Next came the discovery—the key to the mystery of whence the men had got their supplies of that most deadly enemy to mankind—drink. Reconnoitring the fore-castle, the captain and mates discovered an opening in its bulkhead, some boards just placed lightly up to hide it. Through this hole the crew had helped themselves to the bottled beer. They had emptied seventy casks.

The next day William Taylor was buried. "I did not intend to shoot him," affirmed the captain again, as he made ready to read the Burial Service. And that he did not, they all believed. He was visibly affected, and his voice shook a little at the committal of the body unto the deep, until "the sea shall give up her dead."

The captain and officers had now to get the ship to Auckland without a crew. This, under ordinary circumstances, would have been no easy task; and in this case the winds were against them. Soon a strong gale sprang up suddenly from the westward, and they had a hard job to save the sails.

They were some three or four days' sail from Auckland. The wind was southerly, the weather squally, with rain. The ship was under topsails, courses, and jib. At midnight the captain went below to rest. Previous to leaving the deck he told the second mate to keep a good look out for squalls, and attend to the topsail halyards. At about two o'clock in the morning, a heavy looking squall was seen rising to windward. "Stand by the topsail halyards!" ordered the second mate; and a hand at each had them ready for letting go. The threatening cloud came steadily and quickly on. As it reached the ship it poured out a heavy shower of rain; but there was no increase in the strength of the wind. The tail of the cloud was just clearing the vessel, the sky had turned brighter, the rain had almost ceased.

"That will do, the halyards!" cried out the second mate, in his inexperience thinking the squall past. "Make all fast again!" Which was done. Two minutes afterwards, however, the unfortunate young man heard a rushing, whistling noise. The wind, which had been behind, and driving up the cloud, burst on the ship, laying her right over. Terrified, he roared out to let go the topsail halyards. Alas! they were fast; and, before one could count twenty, the maintopmast went over the side, carrying with it the mizen topgallant mast.

Here was a pretty pickle. And no hands to clear away the wreck. The captain would not liberate the crew, and so the few working hands did their best. Fortunately, the carpenter was amongst them, and did



good work with his axe. They cut away everything, and let the wreck go adrift.

From this time they had no further mishaps, and reached Auckland on the 12th of February.

The Kilblain sailed into the harbour with her number up and the "police flag" flying. Long before the police boat got alongside, Captain Taylor stepped on board. He looked around him, and wondered at the very few hands to be seen. Taking this in conjunction with the ship's dilapidated appearance, he jumped to the conclusion that perhaps, when the mast went, the crew were on it, and had perished. He had yet to learn that the actual facts were far more terrible.

He introduced himself to the captain. The latter took him into his state-room, and gave him an outline of the truth, breaking it to him as gently as possible. He did not go much into detail. He simply said there had been a mutiny, owing to the men getting maddened with drink; and, unfortunately, it was his son's lot to be the only one to fall. The old man was almost stunned at the news. He made no comment. "I suppose you buried my son?" he gently asked.

"Yes, indeed, with all the honours. No one, his parents excepted, can more sincerely regret his death than I do."

The police were now on board, and the captain was summoned on deck to them. They speedily conveyed the prisoners on shore, and took them at once before the resident magistrate. The captain's and officers' evidence was heard, and the men were committed for trial. They got some trumpery pettifogger to take their case in hand; and he actually preferred a counter charge of murder against the captain. It was, of course, absurd. The magistrate, however, committed him for trial, taking bail. The assizes were held next week. The grand jury ignored the bill against the captain, their foreman remarking that, supposing the shooting to have been intentional, and not accidental, as pleaded by the captain, he would have been, under the circumstances, quite justified in shooting any of the mutineers, the safety of his ship and those on board her being in jeopardy. And so the men were cast for punishment, and had leisure to reflect on what their unfortunate drinking had brought them to.

Captain Taylor returned home. The shock to him had been fearfully heavy. He did not suppose he should ever get over it, and he felt utterly dismayed when he thought of the task before him. *How* should he tell the news to his wife? He fully expected that it would kill her. However, as people generally do in such cases, he left it to the instinct or promptings of the moment. It was evening when he landed. He walked quickly away from the wharf towards his house, not caring to meet or speak with anyone. Arrived there, he felt his heart

sink within him as he turned the handle of the door. He opened it quickly and went in.

But, ah ! what a scene did he encounter. Mrs. Taylor knew all. Ill news, it is said, travels apace. The whole history of the "Mutiny of the Kilblain" had already reached the principal ports of the colony. She was in black. Seated on a chair, her head was bent nearly to her knees, her hands were listless on her lap. Starting up at Captain Taylor's entrance, she tottered towards him, her hands lifted, her eyes with a cruel pain in them, her voice raised to a wail. "Oh, Davy, my boy ! my boy !"

Hers was indeed a bitter lot. If ever an unfortunate mother's heart was broken—as it is termed—Mrs. Taylor's was, of a surety. During all the years in which she had mourned for the supposed death of her darling son, she had never pictured to herself so terrible a death as this. Shot down, like a wild animal, in a mad-drunken mutiny ! Launched into eternity with all his sins upon his head. Not a second allowed for repentance, not one short moment even to call aloud for pardon. God forgotten ; Christ set at nought !

Never, whilst she lived—the time might not be long—would that dreadful scene on the Kilblain's quarter-deck be out of her imagination. Morning, noon, and night would she ever dwell on it, and wish—few know what it is *so* to wish—that the boy had died in infancy.

That's the true history of the mutiny of the good ship Kilblain.

H. W.



## THE GHOST OF RUSSIAN HILL.

A GREAT deal has been written about the large trees, the magnificent scenery, and the vast gold-fields of California. Even its mammoth vegetables and delicious mutton have had their honourable mention. In short, I do not know of much connected with the country that we are unacquainted with. There's one thing, however, that has not been told of within my knowledge—and that is a Californian ghost. The subject has at least the recommendation of rarity; and perhaps it may be found to possess some interest. For myself, I give no opinion upon the point: I could not at the time: but I will truthfully and faithfully record the story as it was said to happen, and was related to me by the poor woman whose belief at least could not be shaken in it, and over a portion of whose life it had exercised so strange an influence.

It was in the year 1854, and I was living at San Francisco. Chancing to need some one to assist me in doing some plain sewing, Mr. Evans, one of the merchants of the town, and a man whose character for benevolence was known far and wide, gave me the address of a Mrs. Addis. She was a superior person, quite a lady, he said, who had come to that country from her native land, America; and was reduced to live by her own exertions. He added that she had been recently very ill with nervous fever, was hardly strong enough yet for the harder work of washing—which she had before been taking in—and no doubt she would be glad of the lighter employment of sewing.

"*Washing!*" I exclaimed. "A superior person, quite a lady, and reduced to take in washing!"

"Ay," replied Mr. Evans, "and thankful to get it."

So, one morning, away I started for Mrs. Addis's, climbing over the intervening sand-hills that lay between St. Annis Valley and my more centrally situated home. The streets were not then cut through or paved as they are now, so the expedition was quite a pilgrimage, and I was tired before I reached the cottage of Mrs. Addis. I recognized it by the description Mr. Evans had given: a pretty white dwelling with green blinds, standing in a garden surrounded by a picket fence, with an ornamental porch, over which a green vine was beginning to trail. All looked fresh and new; and it appeared she had not long got into it.

A little girl of nine was playing outside with a boy of three: another child, a girl of perhaps six or so, sat wrapped in a shawl, watching them. She looked ill; and indeed there was a delicacy about them

all. The moment they caught sight of me, all three evinced considerable alarm, and ran in-doors. In a minute the eldest came out again, sent by her mother. Blushing very much, she said I must please excuse her for running away, but she and her little sister and brother were shy and not used to visitors. She was a gentle, pleasant-looking child ; but in her face there lingered an expression as of some sudden fright, and I thought it must have been at me.

Mrs. Addis came to the door then. A pale, delicate-looking woman with a sweet face of suffering, and a refinement of manner that surprised me. It was next to impossible to believe that *she* could be doing the work of a common washerwoman. Alas, I had not then the experience I have acquired since, of what well-reared women may be reduced to by distress, when exiles in a foreign country.

The porch-door opened into the parlour, and we went in. It was tidily, nay tastily furnished, with such articles as sojourners in San Francisco would most readily procure. A fresh matting covered the floor. Some cane-seated chairs, and a round table, stood about the room. Beside, there was a set of hanging shelves trimmed with fringe, and plenty of little ornaments and souvenirs, bespeaking home friendships and loving parting gifts from the other side of the continent. All this, and the woman's gentle manner and really pretty face, seemed more and more at variance with her hard calling ; but as one sees these anomalies in a new country, as California was then, I came at last to the conclusion that, whatever circumstances had rendered it necessary for Mrs. Addis to work in the way she did, they had no power to destroy her natural refinement of mind with its old associations.

"You must excuse my little people, if you please," she went on to say. "They are like frightened hares, and fly for shelter at the sight of a strange face ; indeed, we are none of us strong just now, though we are gaining health daily. All, except Nancy, my eldest, have had a long, weakening fever."

"Panama ?" I suggested.

"No," she said, and shuddered a little, speaking slowly ; "it was a nervous fever. I am but just recovering from it myself, having had the most lengthened attack of the three."

And then I remembered that Mr. Evans had mentioned it—a nervous fever.

"What caused it ?" I asked.

But to this question Mrs. Addis made no answer. An unmistakable shiver passed over her frame ; and for the moment I thought she was going to faint.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "I have been much shaken in the nerves ; jarred and worried. I do hope—I do trust that we shall all get well in time, now we are in this pleasant and peaceful house."

"Perhaps the house you lived in before was damp ?"

"No, I don't think it was damp; it was not that," she said. "It was on Russian Hill."

"Unhealthy perhaps in other ways?"

"Yes. Unhealthy—for us,"—and there ensued the shiver again. "About the work, ma'am: what is it you wish me to do?"

I sat and told her. I partook of some refreshment that they offered me—a mouthful of lunch, and some tea. And I came away strangely interested in Mrs. Addis and her gentle children, and quite determined that that first visit should not be the last.

"What is the mystery connected with her illness?" I asked Mr. Evans when I next saw him. "There seems to be one."

"It certainly does seem to be a mystery; one I believe that nobody can explain or account for," was the reply of Mr. Evans. "I daresay she will give you the history if you request it."

And in due time I obtained that history: and transcribe it as it was told to me, neither adding to it nor taking from it.

In early times the means of transit from America to California were so very dangerous and comfortless that, like the man who had choice of two roads, travellers were sure to wish they had taken the contrary one. The lengthened horrors of Cape Horn, the Indian perils on the plains, and the fearful fever on the Isthmus, gave ample themes for sympathy, curiosity, and endless surmise. Mrs. Addis had come by the Isthmus, and her voyage was marked by an all-absorbing sorrow, that swallowed up every smaller consideration of discomfort and annoyance—the death of her husband.

Mr. Addis had been a teacher all his life. Breaking down in health and spirits, as those who have much to do with the young sometimes do, he had undertaken the journey to California to recruit his strength, and also in the hope that he might find there some more profitable and less mentally laborious occupation. He died just as they came in view of Acapulco, and lay buried there, far from home and kindred. Poor Mrs. Addis came ashore with an aching heart, but a strong spirit resolved to labour for the living of her children, the youngest of them nearly an infant, rather than undertake the voyage home again. Her father had been a poor clergyman; she had no friends in her native land capable of assisting her; and would not go back to be a burthen upon them. When one has to lose caste and work for a living, it is less hard to the mind to do it in a strange place. She did not know the work would be quite so menial—but she had put her shoulder to the wheel and took what came.

At first nothing offered: perhaps her visions were too high. She could only clasp her three children to her heart, and pray to be helped to provide for them, not to die of starvation. Mr. Evans, who had been one of her fellow-passengers on board the "*Sierra Nevada*," that had brought them up from the Pacific, and who had seen her

husband laid to rest in Mexican soil, was very kind to her in her desolation.

Washing was paid for well in the place, for washerwomen were scarce; and the notion came to her that she should set up in the calling. It no doubt caused her pride a cruel blow, herself a bitter heart-ache; perhaps a struggle, yes or no, with her spirit. But she resolved on it. She thought she would get day help for the hardest of the labour. Mr. Evans and one or two other gentlemen who had been witnesses to her misfortunes clubbed together to set her going. They found a cheap, pretty house, furnished, on Russian Hill, and placed her in it. It overlooked the entrance to the bay, and had a nice sweep of smooth ground around it, enclosed by a high paling, on which the linen could dry.

They went with her to take possession of it; Mr. Evans and a Mr. Harley, the latter carrying the baby, Willy. What with one busy preparation and another, the day had waned, and evening was drawing on when they started. It was a long, toiling walk up Pacific Street; and then, taking a winding path over the brow of the hill, and descending a little on the side that fronts the Golden Gate, they stood before the cottage. It was a little one-storied place; with a garden in front full of rank, overgrown geraniums and trailing Australian vines, straggling on either side the straight and weedy path.

"This can all be done up nicely, you know," said Mr. Harley cheerfully. "There was no time for it before you came in. It has been empty and neglected for so long that it looks rather wild."

Mrs. Addis answered in the same cheerful spirit: she was so grateful to them that she would not show any regret. But as she was crossing the porch to enter the doorway, a shivering chill struck her that it was impossible to describe or account for. The house was not dark. Those kind friends had had it lighted: a lamp burned on the table; a fire blazed in the open grate: what could have given her that shuddering chill? The children, however, made amends for her silence, for they were loud in their delighted comments on the new house, and their surprise at its odd furniture.

The room was a small, square apartment, with an open grate and a front and back window. Its floor was covered with checked matting and there were two or three curiously coloured rugs laid over it. Besides a scarlet sofa and two large chairs, much worn and faded, were some tiny Chinese tables, and a little cabinet placed on one of them. To the right a door opened into a smaller room, containing only a bed and an old walnut clothes-press. Out of that was a larger room, built sideways and in the shape of the letter L: it had two French windows and a cheerful look-out citywards. A small kitchen completed the house.

"Being night, it looks a little dull," observed Mr. Evans, as they



went through the rooms, "and smells earthy : but that's owing to its having been shut up so long."

It did smell earthy. The very air seemed close and heavy : and Mrs. Addis thought it might be that which caused her strange oppression of spirit. Everything needed for their comfort was at hand, and the gentlemen departed, leaving grateful hearts behind them.

The days went on, and the feeling of oppression, as Mrs. Addis expressed it, wore lighter by degrees ; but she always had a sense of it more or less. Only when she was at work she did not so much feel it. Her kind friends had exerted themselves to get her plenty of work ; it was hard at first, but she had help, and got reconciled to it. The little room leading off the parlour was made a play-room for her children : it was lined with scarlet chintz : the large, curiously shaped room was made the bed-chamber.

So she worked, and prospered ; and began to put by a nice little sum every month towards repaying Mr. Evans and the other gentlemen what they had advanced her. Her expenses were not large. The rent of the house was remarkably low, and she sometimes wondered at it, hoping that Mr. Evans was not paying part of it himself in secret. He said he was not, but she could not help fearing it. They had no near neighbours ; but farther down towards the Laguna was a settlement of Spanish people, whose children would come up and peep curiously through the garden rails. That their house had been inhabited by Spaniards, who must have quitted it in a hurry, was evident, for the furniture was all Spanish.

When it first was Mrs. Addis could never distinctly trace or recollect that she heard her children allude to some one they called "the lady." She grew *accustomed* to hear them talk of her ; but when she at length asked an explanation of who the lady was, there seemed to be some mystery in the answers. The children only saw the lady "at moments," they said : they would look up from their play and see her by them, and when they looked again she'd be gone, they did not know where.

"Does she come into the garden, Nancy?" asked Mrs. Addis of her eldest girl, a most intelligent child.

"She comes indoors as well, mamma."

"Comes indoors as well ! What does she say?"

"She never speaks at all," was Nancy's answer. "Mamma, she just comes and goes like the shadows in the garden."

This was very strange. That it was some person from the Spanish settlement at the Laguna, who came up to indulge her curiosity, Mrs. Addis felt sure of. The next leisure hour she had, she walked out that way, taking Nancy, and bidding her point out the lady if she saw her. Mrs. Addis did not altogether like the idea of a stranger's entering her home at will without asking leave.

It was a bright, sunshiny afternoon, and all the Spanish people seemed to be outside their cluster of huts enjoying it. The women were sewing, the children playing. Mrs. Addis walked along, exchanging pleasant looks and nods with these people, as is the custom in an unsophisticated place like San Francisco; and they nodded and smiled back again.

"Do you see the lady, Nancy?" she asked in a low tone.

"No, *mamma*, I can't see her anywhere."

All at once, as it were, Mrs. Addis became aware of a certain curiosity in the manner and looks of these people as they regarded her, far beyond the natural curiosity excited by strangers. It was, as she afterwards expressed it, an *awestruck* curiosity: they gazed at her as though she were a rare, wild animal.

"*Muy malo casa*," she distinctly heard, and the speaker had her eyes directed to her home on Russian Hill. Mrs. Addis had caught up enough of Californian Spanish to know that it meant "Very bad house."

A small, bright-eyed "*senora*," with two children at her side, leaned against her little gate, looking both curious and excited; Mrs. Addis stopped and asked, in a mixture of tongues that might have made any one laugh to hear her, why they all stared at her so, and what was amiss with her or her house.

The *senora* took a little time to gather in the meaning, and then she said she was mistaken about herself, for they all thought well and kindly of her; but as for the house! Here she shook her head and gesticulated with her hands, and became quite unintelligible. Mrs. Addis begged her to repeat what she had said, which she did in precisely the same manner; but beyond the words, *bad man* and *bad house*, she could gather nothing.

It made her feel uncomfortable, and as she went up the hill again, she regarded her neat little abode with a puzzled wonder. Having an errand to do at the nearest store, which was kept by an Italian, in a tent on Pacific Street in those days, she sent Nancy on to the younger children. When she returned, carrying her few little parcels, twilight had set in, and the great misty columns of fog that sometimes sweep in from the sea, were making the landscape very dreary. Still, as she climbed the hill from the city side, she could see her own door quite plainly, and in it the three children at play.

Not they only. There was a fourth figure standing with them—a Spanish girl of slender form. She had a *serapa* thrown over her shoulders, and was watching them with a slightly drooping head.

"That must be the lady!" exclaimed Mrs. Addis to herself with sudden conviction. "How young she looks!—quite a girl."

In her excitement, Mrs. Addis stumbled over a stone and dropped her paper of sugar. Stooping to pick it up, her eyes were withdrawn

from the lady for an instant, and when she looked up she could not see her anywhere. The children were playing on in the porch, as before. In her haste to gain the house, she lost her breath.

"Where's the lady?" she inquired of her children. "In the parlour?"

The little ones looked round, as if searching for the lady so as to answer the question. "The lady is not here, mamma," said Nancy.

"But she was with you a minute ago."

They seemed surprised. One and all declared the lady had not been there that evening. Minnie, the second child, said she had not played as much as the others, and must have seen her had she come. But Mrs. Addis had the evidence of her own eyesight, and went to look; a vague feeling of something strange was beginning to dawn upon her.

The lady was not in the garden, back or front, as might be seen at a glance. Mrs. Addis went into the different rooms indoors, and she was not there. Where lay the mystery? In what did it consist?

From that night a conviction of something dreadful—something to be avoided and feared, sat upon her. Day by day it deepened, like a darkening cloud.

It was extremely painful to acknowledge to herself that this curious and inexplicable thing had greater power over her, in depressing her heart and paralyzing her spirits, than the severe sorrow that had passed over her life, leaving her alone in the world with its troubles.

A vague fear of some ill to come haunted her, and yet she had not the courage to confess the weakness, and beg Mr. Evans to find them another home. Whenever the children named "the lady," she shuddered, and yet could not reason clearly on the subject, or decide sensibly what foundation she had for misgiving. She became daily more oppressed by brooding over this very uncertainty, and the shadowy dread that haunted her.

One thing she observed: that the children never now spoke of seeing the lady but in the little red play-room. Whenever she appeared to them (if appear she did, and it was not all delusion on their part), it was always there. The singular circumstance was, that they had no fear; and whether they really believed that they saw the lady, one of real flesh and blood, Mrs. Addis did not know. She would not talk to them about it.

Thus the time went on, and October came in. One day she had been down in St. Annis's Valley, and was toiling back upwards after her long journey over the sand-hills. Glancing to the house when she came in view of it, she saw one of their good friends, Mr. Brown, in the porch with the children. He had Willy in his arms, and the two girls were jumping and talking by his side.

"There's mamma!" they cried. "Mamma's come back."

In that moment the strange and painful doubts were lost sight of by

Mrs. Addis: she laughed and nodded in return, and quickened her weary steps.

Suddenly her heart stood still as though it were turned to stone. Passing lightly out at the door behind the group already there, came the figure of the Spanish girl, and stood amongst them so close that their garments seemed to touch; but no one noticed her or appeared to mark her presence. She leaned forward anxiously, and shaded her face with her hand as she watched, looking earnestly down towards and beyond the hill. For an instant Mrs. Addis seemed to lose sight and sense; and when she looked again the figure had gone.

"Was any one with you here a minute ago?" she asked of Mr. Brown.

"There's no one here but me, Mrs. Addis; me and the children. How ill you look! Your long walk has fatigued you."

She said no more. It was on the tip of her tongue to tell him all, but she did not. Perhaps a dread of being secretly laughed at prevented it. How she dreaded the staying on in that house on Russian Hill, only herself knew.

The rainy season commenced early; there was a great deal of it; quite a flood; so that the children played indoors. Mrs. Addis never heard them talk of the lady now, and felt convinced she was not appearing to them. Only twice had Mrs. Addis beheld her; yet she seemed to remember her face as clearly, every feature of it, as though she had known her for years. And, before attempting to relate what followed, a hope must be expressed—as Mrs. Addis expressed it—that she should not be charged with insanity.

It was the 19th of October; almost midnight, and about a fortnight after the walk to St. Annis's Valley. Mrs. Addis, very busy over some sewing and feeling sadly desolate, was at work in her bedroom by the light of the lamp, the three children abed and asleep around her. She sat there for company. The wind sighed drearily without, and the dull tolling of the fog-bell on the beach sounded on each rising gust. Almost imperceptibly at first, a soft, low moan began to mingle with the bell; and it caught by slow degrees Mrs. Addis's ear. She looked off her work to listen, her very blood feeling suddenly chilled. It came from the little room the children played in. She was convinced of that as she listened with hushed breath. Taking the lamp, she moved to the door, impelled by fear, impelled with that strange impulse that forbids you to remain stationary in a dread such as this. Opening the door of the red room she looked in, and saw—well, saw what well nigh turned her brain. She stood in a sort of dream, not knowing whether she was asleep or awake. The room seemed to be filled with furniture—furniture that it had not in reality—a bed, and chairs, and matting on the floor. On the bed lay the lady she had before seen, the Spanish girl; her features distorted with what seemed to be a death struggle.

A man, whose face was not discernible to Mrs. Addis, stood beside the bed. The Spanish girl made a frantic effort to spring up, as if to beat him off, and then sank back and moved no more. The man tore up the matting and some of the floor; and a great hole seemed suddenly to yawn there. Then, by the side of the bed, appeared a long box, and Mrs. Addis felt sure that it was not there a minute before. Into this the man pushed the insensible girl, and lifted it into the great hole.

This was all. Terrified nearly to death, the poor woman lost her senses and fell. As she expressed it afterwards, a cold, dull, awful blank seemed to stretch itself like a black curtain between her sight and the world.

The children found her lying there insensible, and help was called in. In vain her friends strove to impress upon her that this strange scene she seemed to have witnessed was nothing but a dream or a nightmare: she replied by asking whether the appearance of the Spanish girl to her and her children beforehand had been a dream. The night was succeeded by a dangerous fever, and she lay for many days in delirium.

Mr. Evans caused the floor to be taken up in the scarlet room. Underneath it lay just such a box as Mrs. Addis had described: the lady within it unrecognizable from the action of slacked lime. Then the poor people in the Spanish settlement were questioned, and they related what they knew. The house on Russian Hill had been the abode of a young girl belonging to their people; she thought herself the wife of an American merchant, whom she loved with intense devotion; and she used to watch for his coming with anxious fondness. His real wife, meantime, sailed from her eastern home and came to join him; and he, fearing discovery, poisoned the poor girl, as 'twas thought; though none could prove it, and nothing positive was known beyond her disappearance on that night, the 19th of October, two years before.

The American merchant abandoned the house and furniture, just as it stood; giving an agent charge to let it for an almost nominal sum. After remaining empty some time Mr. Evans took it for Mrs. Addis, its low rent being the inducement, and he knowing nothing of the story.

After the discovery Mrs. Addis was removed, and lay long ill at the house of a kind Spanish woman who received her. Strange to say, her children also became ill: as if (people said) the curse on the house were working itself out.

A better home was provided for her—the one in which she has been introduced to the reader—and she removed to it. She was only then recovering from the long illness and was very weak.

Mr. Evans substantiated this story in every particular that he could, as did others. The suspected man had gone with his wife to Australia; and no one had held the Spanish girl in sufficient interest to follow him there and charge him with his crime. He lives in immunity from it, so far as is known, to this day.

I make no remarks upon the story myself ; I give it as it was given to me. That it was strangely singular, none can deny.

And if the reader should be curious on the subject of Mrs. Addis herself, I may mention that she prospered well, and regained her own position in life. But she never alluded to the house on Russian Hill with the least abatement of horror. Nothing in this world will ever shake her belief in the ghost that haunted it.



#### BY THE SEA.

UNDER those waves, for all their tranquil seeming,  
Are graves by no low fragrant winds caress'd ;  
The ocean pearls and buried treasures gleaming  
Above their place of rest.

In their cool depths lie wrecks thought cannot number  
Not softly covered o'er with daisied turf ;  
The seaweed tangled round their place of slumber :  
Their dirge, the moaning surf.

Our human hearts, freighted with wealth unspoken,  
Are launched upon thy changeful tides, O life !  
To find their port at last, sore spent and broken  
With hours of storm and strife.

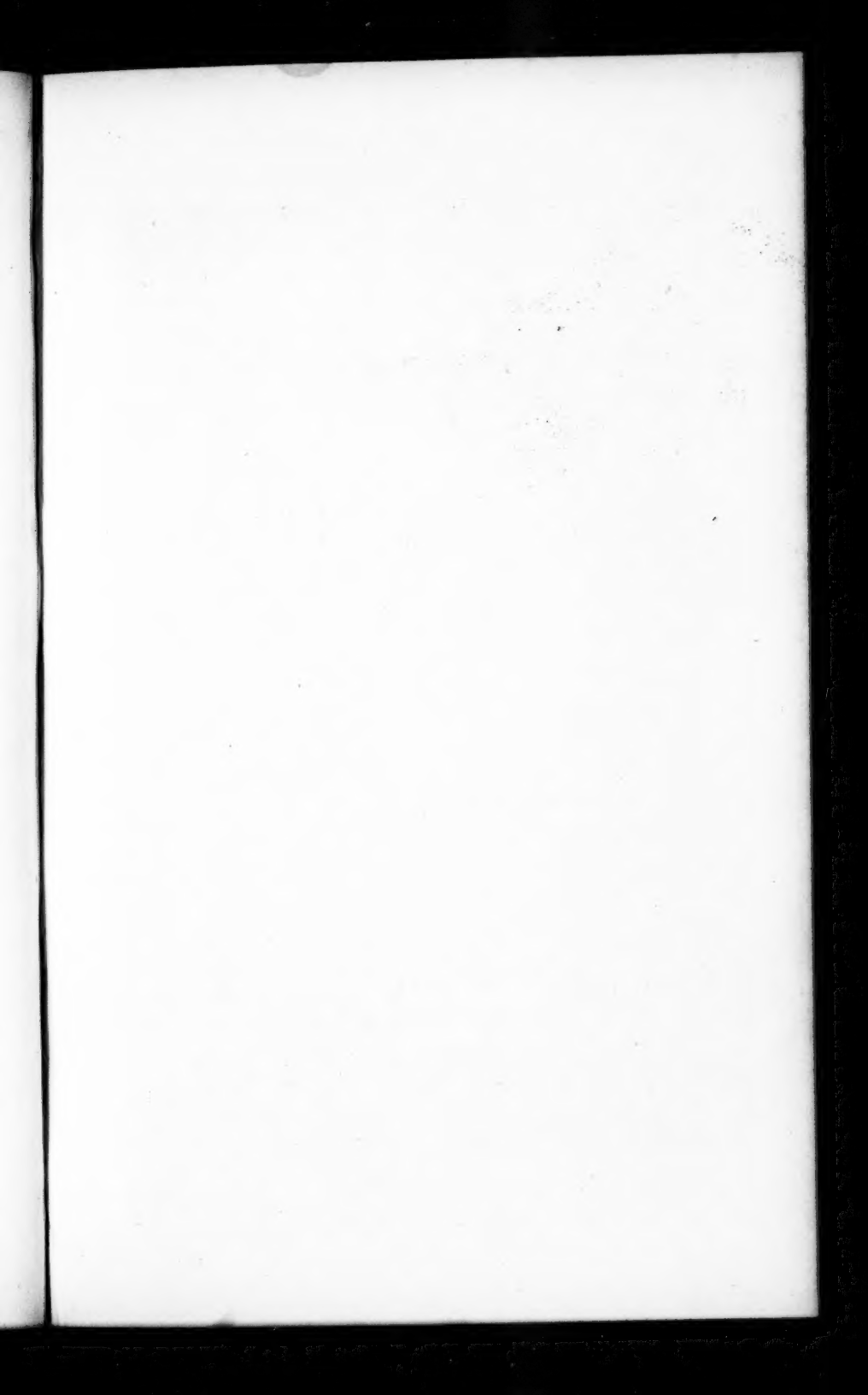
Into thy gulfs, through nights of tempest, throwing  
Our precious things, earth's priceless dower of love,  
And all the while, the deep, dark waters flowing  
Relentlessly above.

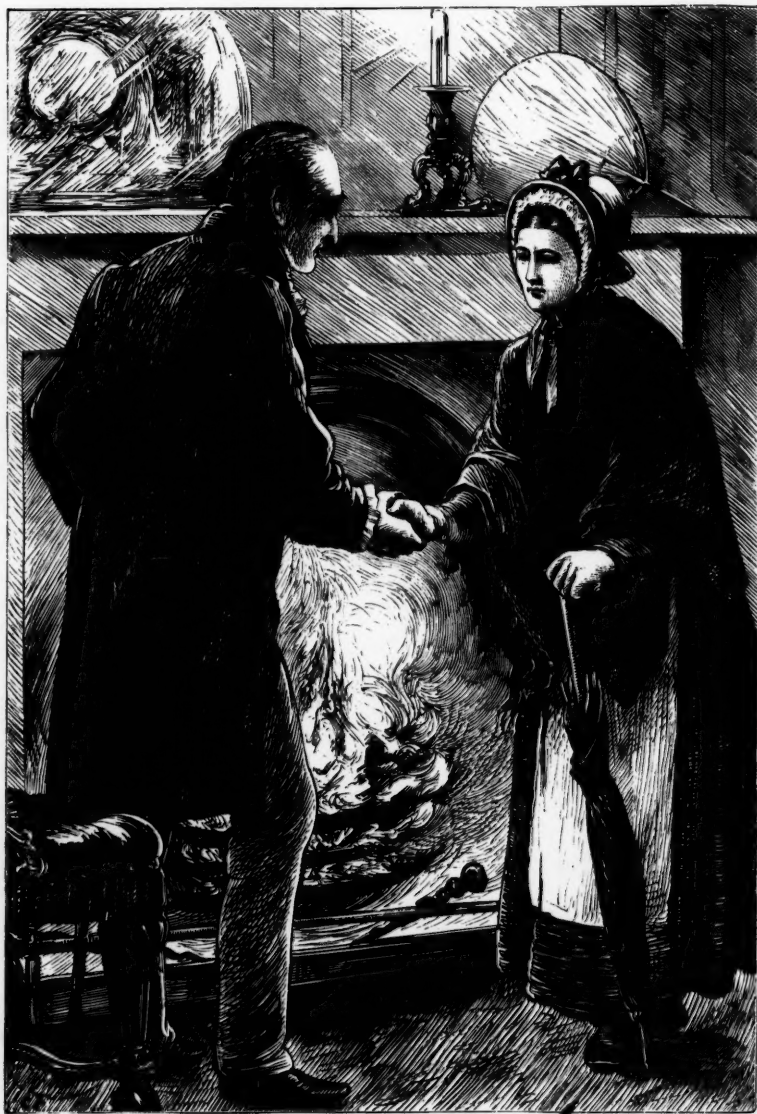
Smiles wreathe the rosy lips, light up the faces,  
Like those blue waves that ripple o'er the dead,  
While memory wanders through the empty places  
Whence light and joy have fled.

Forth from our childhood's flow'ry vales outsailing,  
Never again its happy shores to see,  
All tempest-toss'd, we reach, with spirit failing,  
The land where we would be.

J. I. L.







M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

EDMUND EVANS.

“ ‘ You will shake hands with me, Mrs. Barber? I have repented all I did with my whole heart. It has come home to me.’ ”